

This year when Transfiguration Sunday came and I read Matthew's account, this story felt, well, a little... AI-generated. Am I right?

I mean, it's like someone took the most dramatic Bible elements and asked ChatGPT to throw them all together. You've got a mountaintop, blinding light, fog and mist, dramatically glowing figures from the past showing up, a booming voice from heaven, terrified disciples falling on their faces, and then poof, it's over and everyone heads back down the hill.

If someone pitched this as a movie scene, we might say, "That's a lot to take in."

Honestly, sometimes this story feels like an episode of Star Trek. You almost expect Leonard Nimoy to beam in, tricorder in hand, raise an eyebrow, and calmly inform Captain Kirk that "it appears we are witnessing a rare cosmic event." And we can hear Scotty somewhere in the background, incredulous, exclaiming, "Captain, the sensors are picking up... Moses and Elijah."

And then, of course, my brain jumps to Neil Young singing in *After the Goldrush*, about "silver spaceships flying in the yellow haze of the sun", and I think maybe moments when heaven and earth overlap have always stretched our imagination. Maybe when something holy breaks into ordinary life, our language gets a little strange because we're trying to explain something bigger than we're used to seeing.

Which is funny, but also honest. Because if we're truthful, this story is seriously weird. It doesn't fit neatly into our categories. Part of us wonders what exactly we're supposed to do with it.

Frederick Buechner once said about this story, *"Even the people who were there didn't know what to make of it."*

And honestly, that's comforting. Because if Peter, James, and John were confused standing right there in the middle of the shining cloud, then we're allowed a little confusion too.

And maybe that's exactly where we're meant to begin. Because every year, right before Lent begins, before ashes and repentance and the long road toward Jerusalem, the Church invites us to this mountaintop moment.

It's like God wants us to have one more glimpse of light, one more Alleluia, before things get heavy.

And hey, I think it's an accurate statement that most of us don't arrive here on Sundays glowing with spiritual clarity. We come in carrying whatever the week handed us: good, bad, or indifferent. All the ordinary burdens that come with living life on life's terms.

But, to that, the Church says, *"Come on. Before the journey turns serious, let's put on our hiking gear, climb one more mountain together and see what we can see from up there."*

So that's what Jesus does when he takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain. I wonder what they thought was going to happen. I imagine they just thought they were there to pray and rest after all the busyness of the past days of teaching, feeding, and healing so many.

But when they arrive, suddenly everything changes. Jesus changes! His face shines. His clothes blaze with light. Moses and Elijah appear, talking with him. A cloud overshadows them. And then a voice speaks.

And what the voice says matters.

Because, you see, at Jesus' baptism, that voice from heaven says, "*This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*" That voice speaks about Jesus.

But here, up on the mountain, the voice speaks to us.

*"This is my Son, the Beloved with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."*

And that shift is important. This moment isn't just about revealing who Jesus is. It's about telling the disciples what comes next. Listen to him. Trust him. Follow where he leads.

Which I think sounds simple until you try to do it. Believing something about Jesus is one thing. Listening to him is another. Listening means something might have to change. Something in us and our lives.

Change happens all the time in our lives. We change routines, jobs, habits, schedules. We rearrange furniture and call it transformation.

But transfiguration is something different. Jesus doesn't become someone new on the mountain. For a moment, the disciples are simply allowed to see who he has always been. The veil lifts.

And maybe real transformation works like that for us too. Not becoming someone else but becoming more fully who God created us to be. The light already present in us becoming visible.

But that kind of change rarely happens in isolation. It happens in proximity, in relationship. It happens by staying near Jesus. That's a bit trickier, because we know Jesus keeps moving toward people others avoid: outsiders, truth-tellers, troublemakers, the sick, the inconvenient. Moving us toward people whose lives are messy.

And he just keeps saying, *come with me.*

Jesus knows proximity changes people, changes hearts. Spend enough time near generosity, and we become more generous. Spend enough time near kindness, and we get a bit squishier. Spend enough time near courage, and we grow braver. Spend enough time near Jesus, and we start noticing the people he notices.

And here is where this "listening" starts to get real. Because if, as Jesus likes to say, we "have ears to hear", then Jesus will keep nudging us closer to people we don't understand, closer to people who frustrate us, and closer to situations we would honestly rather avoid.

And if I'm honest, sometimes I'd rather admire Jesus from afar than follow him into awkward situations. You know what I mean?

And here's what strikes me this year about this Transfiguration story. This mountain moment is a turning point. Up until now, Jesus has been teaching and healing and gathering followers. But from here on, the road bends toward Jerusalem. Toward confrontation. Toward sacrifice. Toward love that refuses to quit, even in death.

And, of course, the disciples don't fully understand what's coming.

But up on that mountain, the fog lifts, and they see Jesus in his full glory. And there, with Moses and Elijah standing with him, the whole story of God's faithfulness is gathered. And the voice says, "*Listen to him.*"

The awesomeness that happens on that mountain doesn't erase for Jesus' companions what lies ahead. But it helps them see who is leading them into it.

And maybe our own mountaintop moments work like that too. They don't remove difficulty, but they give us enough clarity to keep going. Sometimes what becomes clear is the very thing we were hoping we could avoid. The conversation we need to have. The forgiveness we need to offer. The change we know is coming. The risk love is asking us to take.

Sometimes what Jesus asks us to notice is not just what's happening around us, but what's happening inside us. The fear we're holding. The control we're clinging to. The trust we're still learning.

And once we see and feel that, well, we can't pretend we didn't.

Peter, bless his heart, of course, wants to stay on the mountain. Let's build shelters, he says. Which feels very human. When something holy happens, we want to hold onto it. Freeze it. Stay where things feel clear and kinda safe.

But Jesus leads them down off the mountain. Because discipleship happens in ordinary life.

And then Matthew gives us this small, beautiful moment. After the cloud lifts and the glory fades, the disciples look up and they see Jesus standing there before them. No more glow, no more ancient prophets. Just Jesus.

And he touches them and says, "*Get up and do not be afraid.*"

And, folks, ain't that exactly what we need to hear too?

Because in a moment we'll leave this mountain and head toward Lent. We'll walk with Jesus through encounters that stretch us, through stories that challenge us, through mercy that changes life.

And none of us really knows what lies ahead this season. Personally, communally, nationally, globally, there is a lot we can't see clearly right now.

But maybe clarity isn't the promise. Presence is.

The Jesus who shines in glory is the same Jesus who walks with us in our ordinary days. The same voice calling us to listen still speaks.

So maybe our prayer this week is simple.

*Lord, help us to listen.*

Amen.