

May I speak to you this day in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When Bishop Michael first asked me about a month ago if I would be open to chairing the Vestry meeting for St. Thomas, St. Patricks and St. Stephen's, which is taking place later this afternoon, I looked ahead at the readings for today to see what they were: and I had to stop and smile. I had to stop and smile because I actually think that the story of the Transfiguration, which we hear today, has in many ways been our story as the Parish of the Valley over the past two years, and I had already been reflecting about the similarities between our parish's story and this beautiful gospel story when I was spending some time with my family over the Christmas holidays.

It all started, of course, almost two years ago now. It started when fifteen churches and chapels spread across the valleys of the Ottawa, and the Bonnechere, and the Madawaska rivers decided to take a risk. They decided — you decided — that the time had come for some significant changes — that things could not stay the same — that it could no longer be business as usual — and that you were prepared to take a risk, and to begin working together with other congregations spread across this region

in new and exciting ways for the sake of the Gospel. For the sake of our “beloved Church.” And just the taking oh that initial leap of faith, my friends, that was no small feat. It was — and I think it still represents for us — a Transfiguration moment.

Fifteen communities of faith joining together and deciding to do something new and different is a sort of miracle for the Church in this day and age. And the truth of that miracle has been recognized by our fellow Anglicans across Canada. Not every new parish or new venture in our shared life together as the Anglican Church of Canada has the Primate come to preach at a Celebration of New Ministry. Yet that happened here. Right from the get go, there was an indication that God was up to something new here: something transformational here. And the Celebration of Ministry that took place well over a year ago now was just the beginning. Since then we’ve seen the launch of a new logo, and a new website, and new social media accounts, and now a shared pew bulletin that’s being used right across our churches on Sunday morning. We’ve had shared book studies, and Lenten Studies, and Bible studies, and choir nights — and we just had a live-streamed video courses with a leading Canadian professor on the topic of reconciliation. Most importantly, we’ve started to pray for one another as a Valley church family: we now have a parish

prayer chain, and a prayer shawl knitting group, and who could forget our shared confirmation class last spring, the class that saw fifteen of our young people being surrounded by the prayers of our Valley community as they were confirmed or reaffirmed in their journeys with Jesus — that was certainly a transfiguration moment for me. That was a moment when my heart sang with joy. For me, it felt like we were literally “singing a new church into being” on that day Confirmation Sunday, as our now former Primate Fred Hiltz once very aptly put it.

It would seem, in so many ways, that it has just been one success for us as a parish family after another; one dazzling transfiguration moment on the mountain top after another. Just two weeks ago, we somehow crammed almost 100 people from every one of our Valley churches into Miles and Lucy’s home, and we had the Bishop of Central Newfoundland kissing a pickerel and playing guitar in the kitchen wearing a Muffer hat with his Executive Archdeacon playing the spoons! Now that my friends was a Valley Transfiguration moment!

And that’s the grace of Transfiguration moments — that’s the grace of the story that we hear today. In Transfiguration moments we realize, just as Peter and James and John realize in this morning’s gospel, that the God of

heaven and earth is with us. That the God of love who paints the stars in the sky and sets the heavens in motion is truly with us. God is actually with us, we mortal human beings. God is revealed: God's son Jesus is revealed as the Messiah, the anointed one in flesh and blood for all of us to see. God says to us, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" And all our hearts can do, like the disciples in this morning's story, is bow down before him and worship.

But now let's think about the Transfiguration just a little more critically. Let's put the sound and light show on the mountain top to one side, and let's put our Bible Study caps on. Jesus, let's remember, doesn't just become the Messiah at the moment of the Transfiguration. Jesus doesn't just all of a sudden become the Son of God because of this beautiful sound and light show. Yes, the Transfiguration is a moment of revelation — it is a revealing of God's presence and God's power to God's people — but the truth is that God has always been there. God in Christ has always been there, just as God in Christ has always been here, working in our beloved Valleys. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been journeying with his disciples for seventeen chapters before they experience the transfiguration. He's been healing the sick, and curing the lame, and binding up the broken hearted for more than thirty years on this earth

before he's transfigured by God on the mountain top. And in our case here in the Valley, we need to remember that God didn't just show up two years ago with the creation of this new parish. We all know that; you all know that. But still it bears saying. God has been here, in this place, walking with the people of these Valleys for centuries — through good times and in bad. God has been there for us, surrounding us with prayer at baptisms, and confirmations and weddings and funerals. God has been with us on so many Christmas Eves, and Easter Sunday mornings, and on all the days in between. God has been supporting the people who have walked on these lands since the dawn of time. Our ancestors didn't just bring God with them when so many of them immigrated to the Valley from across the ocean centuries ago. They brought Christianity with them, yes — they brought Anglicanism, yes — but they did not bring God. God was already here: God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer has always been here.

And that can be one of the risks of Transfiguration moments. If we're not careful, Transfiguration moments like the ones we've been experiencing over these past two years can leave us so awe struck and utterly impressed that we don't necessarily think about the road ahead. Like Peter, we can become so impressed with what we're seeing that we can refuse to leave or take any more risks. "Lord, it is good for us to be here,"

Peter says. "If you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Let's stay put in this place for as long as we can, Peter says. Let's just plant our feet in this familiar and comfortable soil and just stay put.

But that's not what Jesus asks of us, is it? That's not how we got here in the first place, is it? We didn't get to this mountain top by refusing to take risks. No! Jesus, on this beautiful sunny morning, comes to us on the mountain top and he taps us on the shoulder — he comes while we're all still bowed down and trembling before the glory and power of God — and he says to us, and I quote: "Get up, and do not be afraid." Get up, let's keep going. Get up, there's more work to do, there are more risks to take — the story is not yet over.

And that, my friends is the moment where I feel we are today as a parish. After so many powerful moments of Transfiguration, we're now being invited by Jesus to take his hand and begin our journey back down the mountain. And we know that the road that lies ahead won't always be an easy one. We only got here by taking risks, and we know that Jesus is definitely going to ask us as a parish family to take even more risks for the sake of the Gospel. We are going to be asked by Jesus, from our biggest

congregations to our smallest congregations, to let go of some of the things that we may have thought at one point were absolutes or certain. We're going to be asked by Jesus to continue changing, to continue growing for the sake of God's mission and God's love — and those changes won't necessarily be easy. The road down from the mountaintop always leads down to Jerusalem — it always leads to the cross. And yet we also know, as children of the light, as children of Easter, that the road also leads to another moment of revelation, of Resurrection: Resurrection that triumphs over whatever death this world might have in store.

I think my favourite Transfiguration hymn in our hymnal is number 167 — *'Tis Good Lord to be Here*. I've found myself humming that hymn to myself at numerous points over the past week. And I think the verse I love the most is the last one — and it is my prayer for all of our Parish of the Valley as we all prepare for all our annual Vestry meetings:

“'Tis good Lord to be here! Yet we may not remain; but, since thou bidst us leave the mount, come with us to the plain.”

May God continue to be with us, as we journey down the mountain.

Amen.