

A Sermon preached by the Rev. Anne Slakey
February 15, 2026
Last Sunday after the Epiphany — Transfiguration
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Sacramento, California

The Gospel this week leaves me with three questions. What did this astonishing event mean for Peter? I also wonder what it meant for Jesus. Surely it was important even if it was not as astonishing to him as it was for Peter. Finally, what can it possibly mean for us, especially as we head into Lent.

In a way, we have Peter's view of it, much later in his life and ministry, in the Second Letter of Peter. This letter appeared late, too late to have been written by Peter himself. The ancients did not have copyright laws, and were much more flexible about authorship than we are. It would be normal for a close follower of Peter's, who knew him well and understood his thinking, to write in his name if he saw a pastoral need. In this letter, the need is twofold. It seems there are questions about the Transfiguration, is it just a myth? And doubts about prophecy.

So the author, perhaps in the confidence of hearing it from Peter himself, affirms that he saw Jesus in glory on the mountain, and affirms that a voice from heaven spoke, saying "This is my Son, the beloved."

The author then goes on to say that this event is the fulfillment of the Prophecy in Psalm 2, when God speaks about the Messiah. He also tells his hearers that they should hold this event in their hearts, like a lamp shining in dark place, until the day, the last day, dawns.

I think the author is right to put those words into Peter's mouth, because the Transfiguration must have been like a lamp in dark places to him as Peter lived out his life of apostolic ministry,

At the time it happens, Peter is bewildered and terrified. He passes from light into darkness, from seeing Jesus shining in glory to the darkness of the cloud. He is overcome with terror as the voice of God sounds from the heavens. He throws himself to the ground, trying to hide from the presence. Then he feels Jesus touching him, and opens

his eyes to see Jesus bending over him in concern. It is the Jesus he knows, and when Jesus says “Get up, and do not be afraid” Peter is able to do it. Peter and the others are given time to ponder and process the Transfiguration, since Jesus orders them not to speak of it until he is raised from the dead.

When he sees the risen Jesus, Peter is better able to understand the vision. He understands that Jesus really is God’s Beloved Son, and the glory he saw then was only a glimpse of the glory where Jesus dwells now. Peter’s time with the Risen Jesus was short, 50 days, but his life of mission was long, 30 – 35 years. Peter probably returned to the vision in memory, like a lamp shining in darkness, whenever he was in a troubled or dangerous place.

Understanding what the vision might have meant to Jesus is more difficult. We know that Jesus often went apart to pray, but we don’t know what happened at those times. We see him at prayer here, at Gethsemane, and on the cross, so we know that Jesus had the very human experience of feeling abandoned by God, even in prayer. But not here.

We do know that Jesus is at a turning point in his ministry, his message is not getting through. From either Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon, he can look down and see the Jordan Valley spread out, the Holy Land, the home of his people. He is visited by Moses and Elijah, who are usually understood to represent the law and the prophets. But they also could provide experience, support and counsel for dealing with a stiff necked people. When he is so used to the disciples, who don’t get what he’s saying and doing, it might be sweet relief to talk to two leaders who would understand his trials.

We know that this is an experience of light, bright, white light. But it doesn’t seem to be a painful light, like having someone’s high beams shine in your face. It seems to be a light you can get used to and grow into, since the disciples, after a while, can distinguish Moses and Elijah. It seems to be the same light that enveloped Moses when he received the law, so it’s a light that can penetrate you and change you. It seems to be a light that calms and strengthens, not a light that burns. Along

with the light, Jesus hears, as he heard at his Baptism, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.”

So this experience might be for Jesus, as it was for Peter, a lamp shining in dark places. Jesus has turned his face towards Jerusalem, he has predicted his passion, he knows that darkness and death will surround him. But in his words to Peter about the vision, he also knows that light will shine again, that he will rise from the dead.

But what does this event mean for us? In the cycle of the church year, we are passing from light into darkness. Epiphany, the season of light and revelation, gives way to Lent, a season where we steel ourselves for Good Friday, where we attempt to be more acquainted with our own darkness, so that we can turn it over to God. As with Jesus and Peter, this event can be for us a light in the darkness, a reminder that Easter does come.

But we turn towards Lent, I want to invite you to remember not just this Transfiguration, but your own Transfiguration. By that I mean, a moment where, like Jesus, you were given peace and reminded of God’s love for you. Or a moment, where, like Peter, you had an overwhelming sense of God’s presence, or a moment where you felt Jesus’ touch and experienced his comfort.

I’ve experienced such moments myself, and I’m sure you have too. When we follow God, he reveals himself to us. I’ll just tell one story of such a moment, from Thomas Keating, the great soul of Centering Prayer. I once heard him speak of being outside in the evening, and seeing the full moon rise, huge in the sky. He looked at the moon, and the moon looked back at him, and in that moment, he said, God told him that he made that moon just for him. Does that sound strange? Well, the Transfiguration sounds strange, and my own moments of grace might sound strange to you and yours to me. I wish I could communicate to you Keating’s joy and wonder at that memory of God’s love for him.

So remember your moment. Call it to mind, refresh your memory of it. Wrap yourself in knowing God’s love for you. And let it be to you

like a lamp shining in dark places, until the day dawns, and Easter comes again.