

Sermon for Sunday 15 February 2026 – Revd Elke Cattermole, Assistant Priest

Exodus 24.12-18, Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1.16-21, Matthew 17.1-9

Let us pray. As we gather here today in your name, we pray that you will fill our hearts, our minds, and our souls. Transform us, Lord, and make us more like you through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Again and again in scripture, mountains are places where heaven and earth seem to touch one another. God is revealed, not always fully explained, but unmistakably encountered. And yet, just as often, the people who go up the mountain must come back down again, changed but still living in the ordinary world. Many of you may have memories of visiting mountains or hills, walking, climbing, even skiing, or perhaps travelling up by train, a coach, a cable car. Reaching the top can be awe-inspiring, breath-taking, and even a little dangerous. Perhaps you took photographs, amazed at the beauty of God's creation. Others may never have had the experience or the opportunity of visiting mountainous places, or perhaps have no wish to do so. Yet all of us will have had known moments in life that feel just perfect and special. Those moments when light seems brighter, the air clearer, and everything is filled with meaning. Perhaps it was an incredible sunset, a story, a piece of music we've heard, a profound connexion with someone we love, or a time in the quietness of this church when you felt the presence of God so near you could almost touch it.

The Transfiguration that we're thinking of today and have had read to us is also written in the other Gospels. Today's Gospel in Matthew tells us of the transfiguration, a pivotal moment in Jesus's life. The mountain becomes the meeting place of human life and the life of heaven. And at the centre stands Jesus himself, the bridge between heaven and earth. Our lectionaries often only give us a small portion of the story, so it helps to remember what comes before and after. The disciples have been with Jesus for nearly three years now, and Peter had declared Jesus the Messiah, yet they still do not fully understand what that meant. Jesus knows the cross lies ahead for him and all its suffering. The Transfiguration is a strange, luminous, and utterly unique event in the life of Jesus. And Jesus invites his inner circle, Peter, James, and John, up to the mountain to pray. These same three disciples will be with him in the garden of Gethsemane at the moment of the deepest anguish before Calvary.

But this will be no ordinary time of prayer. Everything the disciples experience speaks of God. The height of the mountain, the cloud, the light, the everyday Jesus they knew, the one who grows tired, eats with sinners, weeps at a friend's tomb, is suddenly revealed in a blaze of uncreated light. His face shines like the sun. His clothes become dazzling white. For it is showed God's glory, streaming from Jesus's face. And yet he is not alone, because beside

Jesus are the two giants of Israel's faith. Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the greatest prophet. They appear in glory, speaking with Jesus, yet their conversations carries foreboding. They speak of Jesus's journey and departure, the fulfilment awaiting him in Jerusalem. On another mountain on the Jerusalem hilltop known as Golgotha, Jesus will again be flanked by two figures, but not Moses and Elijah, but two thieves. There God's light would be hidden beneath hours of darkness.

At this moment, though, in today's reading, we come back and see the disciples thinking about Jesus that had led them to that mountain to pray because there was a deeper purpose. When Jesus calls us to the journey of prayer, it's not all sweetness and light. In prayer, we face the suffering of the world, the grieving, the dying, those losing everything through war or disaster. Yet in prayer, we meet the one whose mercy can transfigure all suffering. And in that moment of prayer is a presence of the one whose loving mercy can transfigure suffering and pain.

On that mountain where we talk of Jesus, the disciple see both the shining light of God's love and the shadow of the cross in the face of Jesus Christ. They need time, though, to absorb it. The moment is also almost unspeakable. Then Peter had one of his ideas and wants to build three shelters and preserve this special moment, remembering Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah. But this was not the time for action. It is a time for listening. In the cloud comes a voice explaining, 'This is my son whom I have chosen. Listen to him.'

And this we too are called to do in prayer. Many years ago, a musical, and I'm sure most of you will know it, *The Sound of Music*, was often shown on television, usually in holidays. So when my children were growing up, and they were not growing up when it was first out, it's just it was all the repeats, it became quite a favourite with our daughters because they could sing to it. And one of the things they loved singing was 'Climb Every Mountain'. So if we ever went for hilly walks, and some of our fields are very hilly, they would sing 'Climb Every Mountain'. Yes, you could say, What a silly soppy song. And it was an emotional song, but to see them running, laughing, and singing this song, even to this day, and they're in their 40s now, it just can take you all to that moment of quietness and a prayer.

Prayer in all its fun is an adventure, though. Jesus invites us to share with him every day to pray. And most often we are in the foothills of the daily office or at our own time of quiet prayer during the day, in the morning, in the evening, and midday. And it takes us to a spiritual high, and highs and peaks of illumination can happen to us, but they are likely to be very few. So much of our life can be very mundane. But our times of prayer may feel like at times we are climbing those mountains and we don't know where or how we will get the strength to go on. Life seems so difficult. We want to be at peace, away from sickness, away from fighting, and the

threat of death. Yet when we had the special moment, that very special moment, we then suddenly want to bottle it up.

I've had many conversations with people who say to me they remember a special moment and they felt they really just wanted to keep hold of it, not just in memory. They wanted that same feeling of glowing and wanting to go forward and wanted to stay like that forever. We might say, 'Why can it not stay with us all the time?'

This is the last Sunday before Lent, and we start the lent in season with Ash Wednesday on Wednesday the 18th, with a service here at 10 o'clock. Lent is the Church's annual invitation to a very big adventure. Forty days of prayer, maybe fasting and giving in preparation for Easter. Are we ready for the prayerful adventure of Lent? Have we decided what fasting will mean for us or what charity or people to support.

I have always liked mountains or hills and find them amazing and peaceful. I have done very minor hill walking and in the past, but never undertaken any mountain climbing. I appreciate very much, though, the importance of wearing the correct clothing, having the appropriate equipment, and the importance of correct preparation. My first adventure walking on the mountains in Scotland was on my honeymoon with Roger, who was an experienced hill walker. He won't say he is, but he is, to me anyway. And he purchased my first walking or hiking boots, and they became a great asset for future walks.

So a question we can ask ourselves now is, how do we prepare for Lent and Easter? Have we considered how we'll pray or get together this Lent. We are having a Lent course, as we heard earlier. You can see the timetable in the pew sheets and sign up as a group. Maybe God has a glorious view in store for us and help us listen to what he's saying to us. The Transfiguration is given to us to strengthen our faith for the journey ahead. It is God's way of saying, 'I know the path is hard, I know the plain is dusty, but this is my son. This is the destination. Trust him, follow him, listen to him.' From a mountain path or a summit, the view can be clear and the view wonderful, or suddenly it becomes dark or obscure. The same is true of our vision of God. May we, like Peter, James, and John, have the grace to perceive Jesus's glory, even in the ordinary. And may we, strengthened by that vision, have the courage to leave the mountain and to follow him wherever he leads. God's glory embraces light and darkness, joy and pain, agony and excitement, the cross and the resurrection. So are you prepared for Lent? Will you come be with Jesus and climb the mountain of prayer and learn together?

Amen.