

2026 Epiphany Last A

Take a minute and think about someone you look up to. Someone whose wisdom or compassion or gentleness has helped you through a time of uncertainty. That person you call for a perspective check.

Got someone in mind?

Now imagine this person invites you and a couple of your friends out for a hike. Imagine they lead you out into a quiet, somewhat wild place. Imagine they invite you to join them as they start up a hill.

Now imagine that they are just slightly ahead of you on a curved part of the path, so that you lose sight of them for a moment and when you catch up with them....

Well, something really weird has happened. This person is glowing with an inner light. You can barely recognize them.

What's more, they are standing there with Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.

How do you respond? What do you notice first? What are you feeling?

Do you believe what you're seeing, or do you think you've fallen into some sort of hallucination? Wondering if you ate some sketchy mushrooms with your picnic lunch?

I have been thinking a lot this week about what it must have been like for Peter, James and John to witness this thing we call the Transfiguration. I've wondered which was more amazing to them—that Jesus was shining with an inner light, or that he was standing with two men who had been dead for centuries.

What caught their attention?

What catches yours?

I am called upon to preach on the Transfiguration every year on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday. That's 24—25?—sermons on the subject. Each Gospel includes the details of Jesus radiating a blinding light, of the presence of Moses and Elijah, and a voice repeating those words from the Baptism story, "This is my Son, the beloved."

But each describes the response of those three disciples differently. In Mark and Luke, they are immediately afraid. But in Matthew, as we heard today, the fear doesn't come until the voice speaks.

There is a moment of wonder.

****pause****

Today we wrap up this season of light we call Epiphany. I hated missing two Sunday of an already-short season this year. I wanted to be able to focus on all the promise of light shining in the darkness for a little longer.

Especially this year, when it seems like every day some new, awful bit of news arises. The horrific details coming out of the Epstein Files makes me physically ill. The petulant behavior of a person in a congressional hearing enrages me. I need those images of the light of Christ to counterbalance the darkness. I'm not sure I'm ready to enter into this season of Lent, when we intentionally face up to all the ways in which humanity fails to live up to the hope God has for us.

So I need to point out that this amazing Transfiguration happens just before Jesus and his disciples turn toward Jerusalem. Jesus is preparing himself, and those three disciples, for the challenges they are about to face. He gives them this one last dazzling glimpse of the deep truth about who he is. God's beloved Son. One worth listening to.

As I meditated on this over the past week, I reviewed all the traditional teachings about what it means that Jesus

appears with Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the Law and Elijah the Prophets, Jesus is the fulfillment of both. Jesus is the lens through which we read them...blah blah blah...

Jesus took those three disciples up on the mountain *with* him, rather than going alone. I sometimes wonder if this glowing shining Jesus thing happened every time Jesus went off alone to pray, but there had been no one else there to notice it. On this trip, Jesus was preparing himself to face what was coming next: the violence and brutality. The betrayal and denial. So he took disciples with him. As witnesses? Maybe.

But maybe as *companions*. A reminder that we don't have to face these moments alone. We are stronger together.

And then something really stunning occurred to me during Compline on Thursday night.

Jesus was also *met with* community. Moses and Elijah weren't there just to represent the Law and the Prophets. They weren't there just to make some theological statement.

They were there as companions. As people who had lived through some pretty horrible events in their time. I've commented before that both Moses and Elijah went

up to the mountain at particularly stressful times, and both had an encounter with God that both comforted them and challenged them.

How many times in the past few months have I reminded us that we are never alone, that Jesus is always with us?

What if that encounter was a gift to Jesus, to be reminded that he, too, is never alone?

What if they were there with him not just to remind him what is written in the Law and the Prophets, but to assure him that they will be with him as he faces the struggle to come?

Lent begins on Wednesday. We hear in the invitation to a holy Lent that it is a time of self-examination and repentance, prayer, fasting and self-denial, and reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. I am embarrassed now to realize that I always read that as tasks I had to do alone. Maybe that's why I have never particularly liked Lent. It felt lonely.

Maybe this year, we look for the ways in which God is inviting us into relationship with each other, to build community together. To be carriers of the Christ light for each other, so that none of us is left alone in the dark. Amen.