

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, ‘Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.’”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I have always liked Transfiguration Sunday. While the day isn't filled with the excitement of Christmas or the joy of Easter, it has some wonderful messages to share with us. For a few moments, the glory of God that has been veiled in the human flesh and blood of Christ, our Saviour, shines through in a wondrous way. For a moment, Peter, James and John are given a glimpse of heaven's glory, including the glory of the saints, as Moses and Elijah stand with Jesus on that mountain. The Father speaks, as He did at the Baptism of Jesus to declare His pleasure in His Eternal Son, and all He is doing and will do for us and for our salvation. For this brief moment, a small, small glimmer of heaven's glory is seen on that mountaintop. What a day that would have been!

We know that the events of the Transfiguration had a dramatic impact on the disciples. John, one of the three disciples on the mountaintop says: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14, ESV) John saw the glory of Jesus through the miracles and in so many other ways, but surely the events of the Transfiguration were in his mind. Peter was awed by the Transfiguration and tells us in our Epistle lesson today: *“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”* (2 Peter 1:16-18, ESV) Yes, the Transfiguration had a great impact on the disciples—at least the three who saw it directly.

For us, the glimpse of Christ's glory in the Transfiguration reveals the hope that sustains us as we deal with the struggles of our lives. The events of this day come just before the Lord makes His last journey to Jerusalem and to the cross. There were dark times ahead. When Jesus is arrested, mocked, beaten and finally crucified, it would be easy to think that the darkness could overcome the light. In His transfiguration, Jesus shows that He has a glory that may not always be seen, but which cannot be taken away. This revelation of glory should have sustained the disciples through the coming days. His glorious presence sustains us as we go through our dark days. In this wonderful glimpse of His glory we see the glory that await us, too!

Let's set the scene again. Jesus takes the inner circle of disciples—Peter, James and John—and leads them up a mountain. Maybe we would better think of this mountain as something like Calgary's Nose Hill than one of the Rockies. Mount Tabor is often thought to be the site, and its elevation is under 1,900 ft (Nose Hill is over 4,000 ft. altitude). It could also have been Mount Hermon. That doesn't really matter. What matters is when they get up there, away from the crowds and the prying eyes of others, Jesus is transfigured before them. Matthew tells us that *his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light*. Then Matthew says, Behold! That word shows up often in Scripture. It is a call to pay attention, like, “hey, look at this!” “Look at what is happening here!” “Pay attention, because you don't want to miss this!” And what is so important? *Behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him*. Luke will tell us in His Spirit-inspired Gospel that these two saints *“appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”* (Luke 9:31, ESV) What a moment it must have been. We can almost see Peter, James and John standing there, mouths gaping; stunned and overwhelmed by all that is happening. Good, old Peter finally mumbles something.

“Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Again, it is Luke who tells us that Peter didn’t know what he was saying. He didn’t seem to grasp the significance of this moment.

That leads us into the focus of our thoughts today. Several people have asked me in the last few weeks why Moses and Elijah were with Jesus on the mountain. Why them? Why not Adam or Abraham or David? We do know that Moses was invited by God to come up to meet with God on Mount Sinai, which is also called Horeb. The Scriptures even refer to Horeb / Sinai as **“the mountain of God.”** (Exodus 3:1, ESV) On Sinai, Moses received the 10 Commandments. Although Moses never sees God face to face, just being in the presence of God causes Moses’ face to shine with a radiance so bright that the people were afraid to look at him. Moses wore a veil to be with the people, but removed it to be with God.

Moses is also viewed with a special prominence among the people of Israel as the law-giver. The first books of the Bible, which are known as the Torah or the Pentateuch, are referred to in Scripture as the **“Book of the Law of Moses”** (Joshua 8:31, ESV) Moses also pointed to the coming Messiah when he had declared to the people in his farewell address that **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen”** (Deuteronomy 18:15, ESV) Now Moses is with that Greater One, honouring Him in the presence of the disciples.

What about Elijah? Elijah is one of the greatest of Israel’s prophets. Elijah is different from the prophets who wrote their specific messages, like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Malachi. We do know that he is one of two people in all of history who did not die. Elijah is carried up into heaven in a fiery chariot. Elijah was also blessed to be in the special presence of God on a mountain. Do you want to guess what mountain? After his contest with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, Jezebel threatens to kill him. Elijah flees and wishes he was dead. He is fed by an angel, and in the strength of that heaven-given food, he travels forty days until he comes to—you guessed it—Horeb, the mountain of God, where God speaks to him in gentle breeze, to remind Elijah that God has a plan even in these dark days.

Now back to the mountain of Transfiguration. We could question how Moses and Elijah could even be there, since they have long departed from this world. Yet, as Jesus says: **“[God] is not God of the dead, but of the living.”** (Matthew 22:32, ESV) Nothing is too hard for God, so having these departed, yet living saints appear with Jesus is no problem at all.

But why them? These two men are often spoken of as symbolic of the Law and the Prophets, therefore they speak of the entire Old Testament revelation. Jesus had said: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** (Matthew 5:17, ESV) Christ shines with a glory greater than anything seen in Moses and Elijah, and so we see a visual testimony to the Lord, who fulfills all things and who fulfills all righteousness.

Elijah is also important as the messenger of the covenant. God had declared through the prophet Malachi: **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”** (Malachi 4:5, ESV) Jesus had told His disciples before John’s execution: **“For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.”** (Matthew 11:13–14, ESV) Now our text says: **as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”** But then the disciples ask Him: **“Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”** (Matthew 17:10–13, ESV)

Moses is the great Law-giver and mediator of Israel, who died but whose grave no one has ever found. With him we see Elijah, who never died, but was caught up to heaven. These two men had the experience of being on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God during their earthly lives. Now they are on this mountain, talking with their Lord and Saviour, the One who is greater than them both. But there is one more who is also with the Son on the mountain. In the midst of all this overwhelming splendour, the glory of the Father, who is always with His Son, descends upon the mountain. He makes it clear what matters: **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”**

God’s plan for our salvation is coming to its full measure. Jesus keeps the law perfectly, showing He is greater than Moses. He fulfills all that has been promised by God, showing He is greater than Elijah and all the prophets. But there is one thing to which the Law and Prophets point—the cross. The cross looms large as Jesus and the disciples come down the mountain.

The pain and punishment of the cross is what we deserve because of our sins, but we are blessed with forgiveness because Jesus gives Himself willingly as the ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29, ESV) Jesus has also made it clear that this vision should be shared after His resurrection. The dying Lord will also be the victorious, living Lord! He will take away all our sins and give us the blessing of life forever with Him. The scene on the mountain is but a sample of the greater glory that is yet to be revealed for us.

So, why them? They testify to Christ. Why Peter, James and John? They testify to Christ. Why the voice of the Father? He testifies to the saving work He has appointed for His Son. Now, through their testimony, we see the glory of the Saviour, and the glory that is ours as His redeemed, forgiven and living people! Amen.