



Sunday Sermon  
February 15, 2026  
The Rt. Rev. James R. Mathes

## **Last Epiphany**

Mark 9: 2-9

*Come Holy Spirit: Touch our minds and think with them, touch our lips and speak with them and touch our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. **AMEN.***

In secondary school, college and seminary, I was drawn to the library. Each book seemed to open a new world. I loved to settle each day in the periodicals section. I would pull a newspaper hanging on a pole and read the news of the day. As I was formed for ministry, Swiss theologian Karl Barth's admonition to "preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other" made sense to me. I still believe it is vital to know the news of our community, country and world. However, our 24/7 cable/internet ecosystem is harder. In the age of Trump, news feels toxic. We hear and see things that are traumatic and not good for our souls.

Late Tuesday afternoon, we received the first news of Tumbler Ridge. It was eerily familiar to me - a school shooting - but now here in Canada. It is impossible for us to get our heads around children being executed by someone who was so, so troubled. We have seen their pictures. Our hearts break. Our sense of security and safety shifts perceptibly.

Even before Tumbler Ridge, several people have shared how the burdens of the world and the non-stop news are affecting them. Many consider stepping away from this cascade of bad news. What would it be like to turn it off, leave Facebook, TikTok or Instagram? We crave time out, a retreat from all the bad news. It feels so dangerous, unstable, and unkind. It is too much, too spiritually draining. Trauma experienced and seen has effected our souls. Sure, we are supposed to care for the world as Christians. But isn't this like being on an airplane, a time to put our own mask on before we help others? We must balance soul care with world care, right?

And so, with all due respect to the wisdom of Karl Barth, let us leave the newspaper aside, at least for a while, and simply pick up our Bibles, specifically today's gospel. Let us ask how we might be a good news people in a bad news world without losing our heart, our hope, our very souls.

It is so timely that our gospel invites us to go on retreat with Jesus. Peter, James and John to a high mountain. A retreat is what we need. Jesus and the disciples do too. They are exhausted. Our Lord has been doing so much, preaching, teaching, healing. The pressure is

building after the execution of John the Baptist as well as his own contending with the Sadducees and Pharisees. Bad news and threats abound.

On the mountain, the disciples experience a deep mystery. Jesus is transfigured before them. His “face shone like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white.” And he is not alone. He appears to be talking with Moses and Elijah - Jesus, God with us - indeed the culmination of the law, Moses, and the prophets, Elijah. Quite a retreat, eh?

New Testament scholars tell us that what happens in this transfiguration is all about what lies ahead—the journey to Jerusalem, the last supper, the betrayal, the crucifixion, and the empty tomb. That connection becomes clearer when we realize that our Bible renders “transfigured” from the Greek word, *μεταμορφόω* (*metamorpho*). Scientists use the same word, metamorphosis, to describe rapid biological transformations: think about a caterpillar weaving a cocoon and emerging as a butterfly. Metamorphosis is radical. What was once was a caterpillar is transfigured into a butterfly. This transmutation into holy brightness with blessed company is a vision of Jesus’ glory in Jerusalem, a transformation that will only possible when a man on a cross enters a cocooning tomb and after three days emerges as the resurrected Christ!

Peter, James and John are overwhelmed by Jesus transfigured. Who wouldn’t be? And in their own world-weariness they confuse vision for destination, a chance to shift from a momentary retreat to a permanent sanctuary home. We’ve arrived - look at Jesus. Surely, this is the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

Peter gives voice to these desires, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwelling places here, one for you, for Moses, and for Elijah.” We can almost hear Peter add...let’s not go back to plotting Pharisees, wicked Herod, and those Roman crosses of oppression. Let’s stay here. Let’s not risk it.

To be sure, those disciples do not have the full story. They don’t know of the cross and empty tomb. They cannot possibly know what the transfiguration means for them, for the world, for us. With their vision and their partial understanding, cocooning on the mountain with Jesus, Moses and Elijah looks pretty good.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be hidden away or held by a few cloistered ones in safety. This is the Beloved in whom God delights. To follow him is to listen to him, even as he bids us to go into the midst of the world’s woe. Good news is only good news when it is shared. Jesus and the disciples leave the mountain. Because they have good news to share. So do we.

Hear me well: stepping aside, recharging our batteries, retreating from the sorrows of the world is a holy and good thing to do. And yet, it is not our destination. The late Bishop Barbara Harris put it well, “We are an Easter people in a Good Friday world.” As we leave the mountain of transfiguration with the disciples, perhaps we could alter her words a bit: we live in a disfigured world, but we strive to live transfigured lives. (1)

What does a transfigured life look like? We glimpse it as Buddhist monks walk from Texas to Washington, DC in relentless steps as a beacon of peace, compassion, and unity in a disfigured land where voices cry anger, hate, and retribution. There is something contagious in the beauty of their walk that transfigures a broken world.

Transfigured lives, though, are all around us. Transfigured lives dazzle in simple yet profound ways: when dear ones come together in our gathering room to support each other in a sober life, when we give a ride to a friend, sit with one who is lonely, make sure a hungry person is fed, clothed and sheltered. Whenever you open your heart to another, transfiguration happens. Light shines forth. And transfigured living: it is the only thing that mends a disfigured world.

Beloved, it is good to care for our souls, to turn off the tube, put down the paper, to go aside to that quiet place and rest. It is why Jesus took his disciples to the mountain; it is why we come here. We have good news for a wounded world, and so we leave our mountain. The psalmist reminds us, "Weeping may stay for the night; but rejoicing comes in the morning." Morning dawns with each breath and movement of transfigured lives. Like those monks on the road, perhaps we are a procession of just that, a company of the transfigured bringing peace, compassion, and hope. Good news, indeed. Let us pick up our Bibles and our newspapers and tell stories of transfigured lives.

(1) Language borrowed from a prayer written by the Rev. Tod L. Hall and published in a booklet, *A Disfigured World Demands Transfigured Lives*, Trinity Church, Copley Square, Boston, 1984