

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19  
9:00AM & 11:00AM



On the  
Mountain



“On the Mountain”  
February 19, 2023 | Jazz Sunday | Transfiguration Sunday  
Charlie Berthoud | Job 12:7-10

Happy Transfiguration Sunday!

Every year, on the Sunday before Lent begins, we find ourselves at Transfiguration Sunday—a day to remember the intriguing narrative of Jesus on the mountain with a few disciples.

It’s important to note that the words that God speaks to the disciples are very similar to the words spoken at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Plus it’s good to know that Moses and Elijah, two of the most prominent figures in Judaism, represent the Law and Prophets.

And it’s important to note that Jesus urges the disciples to not be afraid—one of the most common teachings in the scripture.

Finally, it’s worth pointing out that the word “transfigure” comes from the Greek word metamorphosis, which means change. This same word is used in Romans 12.2, where Paul teaches that God’s people are not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed, by the renewing of our minds.

Listen for the account of the Transfiguration:

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes

became bright as light.

Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Have you ever had a mountain-top experience?

I bet everyone of us has. Some of us literally have gotten to climb mountains—where we can breath fresh air and see for miles. Others of us have metaphorical mountain top experiences—high points in our lives, when things are good.

Those mountain-top experiences give us clarity and focus and new energy for living.

So it’s no surprise that several important things happen on mountains in the Bible.

### **Ten Commandments:**

Moses received these teachings on a mountain, after God had rescued the people, for guidance in the new life. Teachings like:

- You shall have no other gods before me.
- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not covet your neighbor’s house...or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

## Sermon on the Mount:

In this collections of teaching, Jesus tells his followers things like:

- Blessed are the peacemakers.
- Love your enemies.
- You cannot serve God and wealth.
- Do to others as you would have them do to you.  
Seek first God's kingdom.

The prophet Isaiah has a mountain-top vision as well, a vision that the lectionary often shares at Easter, a hopeful vision of God's renewed creation. Listen for God's word:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the covering that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day,  
"See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.  
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Mountain top experiences give us clarity, energy, and hope.

But we can't stay on the mountain forever.

Thinking about the Transfiguration, the disciples had that mystical encounter with Jesus on the mountain, where the voice of God says "This is my Son, listen to Him." I think God said this so the disciples would remember to listen to Jesus once they got off the mountain and back in their daily routines.

One of the most important things we do as Christians is **listen** to God.

Listening is hard to do in our noisy world. We're surrounded by ads and politicians and most of us have phones and tablets and computers—these wonderful devices that we find ourselves constantly looking at.

Being a Christian means we need to cultivate the art of listening—making time in our lives to hear what we need to hear.

Maybe for Lent this year, you want to “give up” some of the noise in your life. Less time with TV, less time playing on your phone. Maybe try blocking out five minutes a day to just sit in silence and look around and listen.

As Christians, we believe God speaks to us through Jesus, so we strive to listen for God's message of love and God's call to service through Jesus.

We hear the call to service in Matthew 25, where Jesus says:

- I was hungry and you gave me food
- I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink
- I was in prison and you visited me

We as a congregation are part of the Matthew 25 initiative of the Presbyterian Church, which means that by listening to these words of Jesus, we are striving to...

- Revitalize the congregation
- Dismantle structural racism
- Eradicate systemic poverty

We need to continue listening to God's call in our daily lives, in the non-mountain top experiences.

God may seem more present on the mountain tops, but God is with us in daily life as well.

This means we can experience God wherever we are, if we look and listen.





When I was a kid, my dad liked to go walking and birdwatching in “Spicebush Swamp”—a little park a few miles from where I grew up in Connecticut. It was nothing stunning—a small pond and lots of trees. The path was often wet and mushy.

Last fall, when I was back for a high school reunion, I walked around at Spicebush Swamp, with gratitude for the simple beauty and with gratitude for my dad who helped open my eyes to see the beauty of creation.

I thought of Spicebush Swamp when I read *Fen Bog Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis*, by Annie Proulx.

"Proulx's mind, her heart and her learning take us on an unforgettable and unflinching tour of past and present, fixed on a subject that could not be more important." —BILL MCKIBBEN

**Annie Proulx**  
Pulitzer Prize-winning author of  
BARKSKINS and THE SHIPPING NEWS

**FEN, BOG  
& SWAMP**

A Short History of  
Peatland Destruction  
and Its Role in  
the Climate Crisis

**Jazz**  
at Covenant

**Creation Care**  
OUR COMMON CALLING

"Before the last wetlands disappear, I wanted to know more about this world we are losing. What was a world of fens, bogs, and swamps and what meaning did these peatlands have, not only for humans but for all other life on earth?"

--Annie Proulx



This book is a lyrical and beautiful reflection on places we might overlook, places with layers of decay and stagnant water, but also places that are vital to health of the planet, and places that are teeming with life in their own way.

I'll never look at marshland in the same way.

As we conclude our Creation Care series, and as we enter in the holy season of Lent, I think about those disciples on the mountain, and how God was trying to get them to open their ears and their eyes.

I invite you to listen and look.

We can hear God speaking to us in scripture,  
we can hear God speaking to us on a mountain,  
we can hear God speaking to us in the people around us,  
and we can even hear God speaking to us in swamps.

Let us pray.

*Help us to listen for you, help us to see your glory, help us to love our neighbors, help us to live as your faithful people. In Jesus' name. Amen.*