

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 17:1-9

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalms 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

February 15, 2026

The Last Sunday after Epiphany

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I was sitting at our dining room table yesterday...it's become my favorite place to work. Books are starting to collect. Journals are piling up. The dogs even have their favorite spot to take in the sunshine. With windows on two sides, there is always something to distract me...which isn't always a good thing when you have a sermon deadline closing in.

And so yesterday, as I was sitting there daydreaming and procrastinating as usual something caught my eye. It was a slight movement in the Camillia bush outside of the window. I sat still and watched until I saw them...a male and female cardinal. Each had twigs in their beaks and were working together to place them just so within the security of the Camillia branches.

It struck me as profoundly hopeful. This process of nest building with snow and ice still on the ground. And yet, these birds kept moving forward, building, creating, bringing forth the promise of new life. As unlikely as it might seem in these bitter cold days, these two cardinals were hard at work creating the opportunity for transformation.

This coming week, we will enter the season of Lent and with it, our own process of transformation. Of building and creating something new. We've been given the light of Christ during the season of Epiphany, we have been shown the power of God's love for this world, and we have been encouraged to take that light and love and make it our own.

But the light we have been given, comes with a great responsibility.

A responsibility to prepare our hearts and minds to embody God's love in order to build a world that reflects who God is calling us to be. And...it's hard work. This kind of responsibility is going to ask a lot of you.

So today, I want us to start preparing for the work ahead...work I want to call hopeful transformation. And if you are feeling unsettled or unsure about the world around you, if you are struggling to find meaning out of the discord and distrust that seem to permeate every inch of our media, if you are wondering how you can be a more loving and caring presence for others right now, then let this Lenten season guide you into a place of good glory.

Our readings for today take us right to the heart of this kind of hopeful transformation. And that transformation begins on the mountain (or in the Camillia bush as the case may be) preparing to build something beautiful.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter, James, and John go up to the top of a mountain with Jesus. There Jesus is transformed into a brilliant light that I've heard described as a reflection of the glory of God. I love that description. A reflection of the glory of God.

It's the same glory we read about in Exodus when Moses climbs a mountain and is consumed for forty days and nights by God's inbreaking into the world around him.

Now we also know something else about this all-consuming glory...it changes the people who experience it. They go up to the mountain with one identity and they come down from the mountain a new creation. They are transformed by what they have seen. They cannot live the way they once lived.

Peter describes his first-hand experience of God's glory up on that mountain as a profound shift in his life. A shift that called forth a greater commitment... a commitment to live a more virtuous life. He outlines what that means earlier in 2 Peter chapter 1 by saying that God's divine power has called us to a life of glory that is defined by virtue, knowledge, self-restraint, patience, godliness, kindness and charity.

That's what Peter's hopeful transformation looked like.

He goes on to say in our reading for today that these qualities of living from and for God's glory are indisputable. We can't debate them. Peter's exact words are "no prophecy ever came by human will", but by the Holy Spirit. In other words...this is God's desire for us. Full Stop. And God's desire is very, very clear.

It's our work to put God's desire into practice in our own lives. And Lent asks us...how are we doing so far?

Are we living a transformed life based on God's desire or are we living something else based on our own desire? I know we all want to say we are living the right kind of life but the reality is that none of us get a pass on doing a deep dive into the quality of our commitments. We have to be honest about where we need to grow in our faith and where we may be falling short.

And here's the other thing about mountain tops...they give us a wide and expansive view of the world around us. Not just the parts we want to see. Not just the things that align with our particular world view or political perspective. From the mountain, we have to see all of it. Even the things that make us uncomfortable, the things that challenge us, the things we don't want to love. Why? Because seeing, truly seeing and listening and understanding is vulnerable work. It's humbling work. It's sacrificial work.

But we are living in a world right now that wants to look away. A world hiding behind a cloud not of glory but of greed. And the result is not hopeful transformation but fearful isolation.

I wonder...if we had Peter's first-hand experience of God's glory, would we still be living this way? Or would we speak up and stand up for something more hopeful? Would we take our vantage point and see a different, more loving way to be in community with one another?

The work of hopeful transformation starts within our own hearts and expands out in glory as we grow in our commitment to build and to create a world that sees each individual as God's beloved. Can we do that?

On Ash Wednesday you will hear this invitation:

*I invite you to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.*

And then in our Litany of Penitence we will acknowledge these things:

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We have ignored the call to serve, as Christ served us.

We have acted out of pride and hypocrisy and exploited other people.

We have envied those more fortunate than ourselves.

We have been blind to human need and suffering, injustice and cruelty.

We have had prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us.

Does any of this ring true for you? Does it ring true for the world we are living in right now? It should...for all of us. And it's hard to admit but we have all contributed to it in one way or another. We all have work to do. That's the work of penitence during Lent. It's the work that helps us see clearly where our hearts may have become hardened.

And then the beautiful part of the prayer goes on to say...

We pray for restoration so that we can be transformed to do the work God is calling us to do.

Restoration and transformation.

That's the hopeful good work of the mountain. And when we are willing to look out far and wide, when we gain a new vantage point on our own lives, we are then and only then able to reflect God's glory to others.

Instead of pointing to problems, God's glory gives us the ability to be a part of the solution. To name where we have failed to love and to serve, where we have ignored suffering or injustice, where we need to let go of old patterns of prejudice, pride, or contempt. So, come down from the mountain and start building a world where glory is granted and grace is freely given.

Because you have been transformed. The old life has gone. The new life has come. It's time to get to work. Thanks be to God.