

# St James United Church



## Message for February 15, 2026 Transfiguration Sunday

“Experiencing the Light” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

2 Peter 116-21; Mathew 17:1-9; Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Book 7, Chapter 10)

For the last two weeks, we’ve reflected on being people of light. Today’s gospel is the granddad of light stories. I invite you to listen to it again, not to understand but experience it:

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, and James and his brother John 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 bright as light.

Suddenly there appeared Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

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, a bright cloud over-shadowed them,

and a voice 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, 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 came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them,

‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’”

So, what did you see? What did you hear? Most importantly, what did you feel? One thing that became clear to me is that Jesus did not shine with ordinary light but rather divine light, the light that God spoke into being in the first moments of creation. And even though Peter, James and John were afraid and overcome, their instinct was to freeze the moment, drawn into it with Jesus. This is a light that God wants to share, even as God is wrapped in the cloud of unknowing. This cloud overshadows them as Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, God choosing to be one with us even more profoundly than when creation first burst forth, taking on human form to show us that God is close, the light always near to us, permeating everything, sustaining everything.

As we heard in Augustine’s *Confessions*, his experience of this divine light in prayer led to his conversion, as he found that God wasn’t just close but reaches out in Jesus, and not just in the past but continues to reach out to us personally. That struck me as I pondered Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus. I’ve heard it preached, heck I have preached it myself, that they were there

to speak with Jesus about his coming suffering and death in Jerusalem, that Peter, James and John were shown Jesus' true identity in God to reassure them as they faced the crisis of Jesus' death. There is an element of that to be sure, but it treats Jesus' friends as bystanders. They might as well not be there. But what if their presence is essential because God is showing them, and us, how God relates with us in Jesus? With Moses, God is powerful, distant, on a mountain as the peak pierces heaven. We expect that. With Elijah, God is still powerful but surprisingly concerned with our wellbeing, speaking through prophets, calling for right relations on earth. But in Jesus, that God of power draws near, a God of close encounter, joining heaven and earth, not once, but through Jesus in each of us, ready for us to shine bright, to catch fire so that God can transform the world through us.

That is both an exciting and unsettling thought. Which is why I think we reduce the moment to a confirmation of Jesus' true identity or a memory to bring resilience to his disciples. This locks Jesus in our heads, making him as much part of mythology, albeit a Christian one, as Peter said that others did with the spiritual heroes that came before Jesus. This happens when we're too focused on our teachings about Jesus, especially when doctrine is captured by one ideology or another. As much as I bristle at Jesus being presented as White and made to mouth anti-woke talking points, those of us who are left leaning, me included, have our preferred verses, we tend to downplay what he said about repentance or personal holiness, fearing that it undermines our aim to be inclusive (even if it doesn't have to). On both sides of the aisle, we can get stuck in our own version of doctrinal purity.

But in Second Peter we read about being eyewitnesses of Jesus' glory, an invitation for us to experience and not just talk about Jesus. When the cloud overshadowed them and God spoke, God told them to listen to Jesus. We don't listen to a static memory but are part of an ongoing conversation. And when we are, Jesus touches us in grace and the morning star of God's transforming love rises in our hearts. It did for Peter as he continued to meditate and pray, as we read in Acts. Then he was able to step from theologies he believed set in stone, for example accepting Gentiles as Christians.

As we get ready for the season of Lent, let's take Peter's lead, Augustine's too, and make prayer and meditation our focus. Start by coming to the Ash Wednesday service or receiving ashes next week. I know many are uncomfortable with being marked with ash, especially if signed using the traditional "Remember that you are dust," but these words point to Genesis, to the creation of the first humans out of soil. God breathed into them. Each Lent we're brought back to that moment, and God breathes into us again, fans the divine flame of love, enables us to shine as we share Jesus' glory. Friends, on this day when we remember how Jesus shone with divine light, we affirm that God wants to share that, always reaching out, always ready to transfigure us and so through us to transform the world. Amen.