

## Lent 2A - March 1, 2026

### A Mountain of Meaning

A brilliant magician was performing on an ocean liner. But every time he did a trick, the captain's parrot would yell, "It's a trick. He's a phony. That's not magic." Then one evening during a storm, the ship sank while the magician was performing. The parrot and the magician ended up in the same lifeboat. For several days they just glared at each other, neither saying a word to the other. Finally, the parrot said, "OK, I give up. What did you do with the ship?"

The parrot couldn't explain that last trick! It was too much to comprehend, even for a smart parrot. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Scholars over the years have tried to explain what in the world Peter meant by this suggestion. But I think trying to find meaning to these words is pointless. It's simply the way Matthew explains: Peter was frightened and he just said the first thing that came into his head. He simply could not comprehend what was happening.

In life, moments occur that are incomprehensible. The birth of one's own child is one of those moments. The loss of a loved one is one of those moments. September 11 was one of those moments. There are mountaintop and valley moments throughout life. We are never ready for them. They arrive unannounced changing us in irreversible ways. But there is one thing they all have in common. They demand that we be silent and listen. These moments have something to say to us, to teach us.

But too often our response is like that of Peter, babbling absurdities because we cannot understand the significant, the meaningful moment. When Peter does finally quit talking nonsense a cloud appears, envelopes them, and the voice of God gives this instruction to Peter, James, and John: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" That's it. Very short. To the point. What Peter said made no sense. What God said had a mountain of meaning. I would like to spend a few moments this morning unpacking the meaning of it:

### Children's Stories and Transformations

Children's stories are full of characters who move back and forth between different realms of reality. Take Cinderella, for example. You know the story of four mice pulling a pumpkin, whisking Cinderella away from poverty into an exalted moment of acceptance and glory. In one transforming moment, the servant is transformed into the queen of the ball. Suddenly, everyone can see Cinderella's beauty and worth.

Or take the story of *The Lion King*, where Simba, a young lion cub, makes a series of selfish choices that lead to his father's death. He has to flee. After a long exile, he is challenged to return. While wrestling with the decision, he sees in a pond his own image, mysteriously transfigured into the image of his deceased father. In that moment, he sees the purpose of his life and discovers the courage to return.

In these stories, reality is seen in a whole new way. As for the disciples, during these very mysterious moments on the mountain, the one they had followed up the mountain was transfigured before them. (by B. Wiley Stephens from *God Comes to Us*)

### **Describe That Person Theologically**

In order to become a minister in most denominations, a ministerial candidate must be examined and tested theologically. The church has a right and an obligation to know if a person is theologically sound before authorizing ordination, so theological questions are asked. I heard recently about a veteran minister who always asks the same theological question of every potential minister; indeed, he has been asking this question of every candidate for over 30 years.

He begins by asking the candidate to look out the window. The puzzled examinee peers out the window, and the old minister adds, "Tell me when you see a person out there." "I see one," the candidate will haltingly announce. "Do you know that person personally?" "No, sir." "Good. Now, my question is this: Will you please describe that person theologically?" In three decades of experience in asking that question, the seasoned minister has found that the candidates tend to give one of two different answers. Some will say something like, "That person is a sinner in need of the redemption of Jesus Christ." Others, however, will respond, "Whether they know it or not, that person is a child of God, loved and upheld by the grace of God in Jesus Christ."

"I suppose," this minister reflects, "that, technically, both of these answers are theologically correct. But it is my experience that those who give the second answer make the better ministers." The reason, of course, is that they have the gift of "transfiguration discernment." They are able to see people in the present tense, in the middle of their circumstances, but they are able to see more than just the present tense. They can also see them as they were at the beginning of creation and as they will be in God's future -- a beloved child of God. (by Thomas G. Long from *Whispering the Lyrics*, CSS Publishing Company)