

02.15.2026 - Christ Church Vienna

Exodus 24.12-end; Matthew 17.1-9

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh lord our strength and our Redeemer! Amen.

Today we stand on a mountain.

(((Both of our readings take us there. In Exodus, Moses ascends Mount Sinai. The cloud covers the mountain. The glory of the Lord settles upon it like a consuming fire. For six days the cloud remains, and on the seventh day God calls Moses out of the midst of it. Moses enters the cloud and remains there forty days and forty nights.

In the Gospel, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. And there he is transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun; his clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear, speaking with him. A bright cloud overshadows them, and from the cloud comes a voice: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.”

Two mountains, two clouds and two revelations of glory.

And we are told these stories today—on the last Sunday before Lent.

That is not accidental, those who made the Lectionary were very concerned.

The Church, in her wisdom, always gives us a glimpse of glory before she leads us into the desert.)))

In Scripture, the mountain is the place of encounter. It is where heaven and earth seem to touch. Moses ascends Sinai not as a spiritual tourist, but as the mediator of the covenant. The people wait below. He goes up into the cloud: into mystery, fire, the terrifying beauty of God’s presence.

“The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people.” Fire. Not comfort. Not sentimentality. The holiness of God is not tame.

And yet Moses enters it.

On the mountain of Transfiguration, something similar happens. Jesus does not merely reflect God's glory; he radiates it. The glory that once descended on Sinai now shines from within a human face.

And here is the astonishing claim of the Gospel: the glory of God is not only something that descends; it is someone who stands before us.

The cloud that once covered Sinai now overshadows Christ and his disciples. The voice that once called Moses now declares: "This is my Son."

The Law and the Prophets—Moses and Elijah—stand beside him. And then they disappear. "And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone."

That line is the heart of the passage. No one except Jesus alone.

Peter, overwhelmed by the beauty of the moment, says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings..."

He wants to build tents. He wants to preserve the experience and to remain on the mountain.

We understand him, don't we?

We all have our "mountain moments"—moments of clarity, prayer, beauty, liturgy, music, love, deep stillness. Moments when faith feels luminous and certain. Moments when God seems close.

And our instinct is to say: Let's stay here.

But the mountain is never the final destination.

The Transfiguration is not given to avoid the Cross. It is given to prepare for it.

Immediately after our Gospel passage, Jesus begins to speak openly about his coming suffering in Jerusalem. The shining face will soon be spat upon. The dazzling garments will soon be stripped away. The voice from the cloud will give way to the silence of Holy Saturday.

The glory on the mountain does not replace the Cross; it reveals its meaning. Because the crucifixion is the glorification of the Lord.

This is why we hear this Gospel today, just before Lent begins.

In a few days, we will enter the season of Lent. We will be marked with ashes. We will hear the words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We will walk with Christ toward Jerusalem.

Lent is, in a sense, a descent from the mountain.

But notice something: in Exodus, Moses remains on the mountain forty days and forty nights. In the Gospels, Jesus will spend forty days in the wilderness. The mountain and the desert are not opposites; they belong together.

The desert strips away illusion. The mountain reveals glory. Both are places of encounter.

Here in Vienna, in our international Anglican community—many of us far from our countries of origin, carrying different languages, histories, responsibilities—we know something about journeying about living between worlds.

Lent invites us into a deeper journey: not geographically, but spiritually.

And today’s readings ask us a question before that journey begins:

What do we do with glory?

The voice from the cloud says only one command: “Listen to him.”

Not admire him or analyse him or just merely talk about him.

Listen to him!

The disciples fall to the ground in fear. But Jesus comes and touches them. “Get up, and do not be afraid.”

This is crucial.

The glory of God does not crush; it raises. The voice from heaven does not condemn; it directs us to Christ. And Christ does not leave us prostrate in fear; he touches us.

That touch is the bridge between mountain and desert.

As we enter Lent, the Church does not ask us primarily to achieve spiritual heroism. She asks us to listen more attentively. To pray more honestly and to let Christ touch the places in us that are afraid, distracted or divided.

Perhaps for some of us, Lent will be less about giving up chocolate and more about giving up the illusion of control. There is also an option of fasting from noise. And of course allowing ourselves to enter the cloud—the unknowing, the silence where God seems hidden.

Because here is the paradox: the same cloud that reveals glory also conceals it.

On Sinai, the cloud hides God even as it reveals him.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, the cloud overshadows the disciples in brightness.

On Calvary, another darkness will cover the land.

Sometimes God is encountered not in clarity, but in cloud.

At the end of the Gospel, Jesus leads the disciples down the mountain.

We are not told what they felt as they descended. Confusion? Awe? Fear?
Silence?

We are told only that Jesus orders them not to speak of the vision “until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

The meaning of the mountain can only be understood in the light of Easter.

And that is where Lent leads us.

We do not enter Lent as spiritual pessimists. We enter it as those who have glimpsed glory.

The Transfiguration reminds us that the Cross is not the last word.

But it also reminds us that glory does not bypass suffering.

For us, in our daily lives—in our work, our studies, our families, our uncertainties, our hidden struggles—the Christian life is not lived permanently on the mountain. It is lived mostly in the desert.

But the desert is different once we have seen His face.

((In a city like Vienna—so full of beauty, music, culture, history—it is easy to associate glory with aesthetics, with grandeur, with achievement.

But the glory revealed on the mountain is the glory of self-giving love.

The One who shines like the sun will give himself completely.

The Beloved Son will become obedient unto death.

And so for us, as an Anglican community gathered from many nations, Lent may be an invitation not only to personal devotion but to deeper communion: listening more carefully to Christ in one another, carrying one another's burdens, allowing the light of Christ to shape how we speak, forgive, and serve.

Because in the end, the Transfiguration is not about spectacle.

It is about identity.

“This is my Son.”

And by grace, through baptism, we are drawn into that same belovedness.

The light that shines on the mountain is the light into which we are being transformed—sometimes slowly, sometimes painfully, but truly.

As St Paul says, we are being changed “from glory to glory.”))

So today we stand on a mountain but also on a threshold.

Behind us: Epiphany light. Before us: Lenten desert.

The Church lets us see Christ transfigured so that when we see him disfigured, we do not lose faith.

She lets us hear the voice from the cloud so that in the silence of Good Friday, we remember.

And she gives us this final non-Lenten Sunday as a gift: a moment to lift our eyes, to behold his face, and to hear once more: “Listen to him.”

Amen.