

# Sunday's Sermon

## Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

February 15, 2026

The Reverend David E. Fox

Transfiguration of Our Lord (Year A) 2026

Matthew 17.1-9

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The highest elevation I have ever reached—while still standing on solid ground—was 10,947 feet. I reached that altitude while traveling the Beartooth Highway on a trip to Yellowstone National Park back in 2011. The highest point of the Beartooth Mountains is 12,807 feet, nearly double the height of the tallest mountain I had experienced before that—Mount Mitchell in North Carolina, which peaks at 6,684 feet.

Standing at 10,947 feet, you can see *a lot* of land. You feel as if you are literally on top of the world—though that distinction technically belongs to Mount Everest at 29,029 feet, more than twice the height of Beartooth Mountain and far beyond anything I could imagine standing on.

The beauty of the Beartooth Mountains is breathtaking. Being that high up makes you stop talking and simply take in the extravagance of God's creation. No matter how important you think what you're doing is, the scenery insists that you pause and pay attention.

The winding road, the slow speed limits, the ever-changing views along the way—all of it builds toward that moment at the summit. It's the kind of place where you don't want to come back down, because everything feels so peaceful and so still. There was no doubt that day, standing at 10,947 feet, was truly a mountaintop experience.

Today, as I mentioned earlier in the service, is the Transfiguration of Our Lord—the last Sunday after the Epiphany and the final Sunday before Lent begins. In our gospel reading, Peter, James, and John go up a high mountain with Jesus. There is no crowd with them. Scripture is clear: no one else was there. Just the three disciples and Jesus, climbing the mountain together.

And when they reached the top, Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word used here is *metamorphoomai*—you can hear the word *metamorphosis* in it. A change took place. A transformation occurred.

Paul uses this same word in Romans 12:2 when he writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

So we know this much: something real happened to Jesus on that mountain. Scripture tells us what changed—his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.

After this transformation, Moses and Elijah appeared—two towering figures from Israel’s story. I’ve always wondered how the disciples knew these two men were Moses and Elijah. I doubt there were framed portraits of them hanging in first-century homes or synagogues like we have pictures of Jesus today. However they knew, they knew: standing there with Jesus were Moses, the giver of the Law, and Elijah, the great prophet.

For Peter, James, and John, this was an overwhelming mountaintop experience. These men were foundational to their faith, to their identity, to their understanding of God and their place in the world.

Peter, caught up in the moment, wanted to preserve it—or at least stretch it out a little longer. He offered to build dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. And really, who can blame him? When you’re standing on a spiritual high point, the last thing you want to do is leave.

How many of us have had mountaintop experiences of our own? Maybe it was a family vacation, or a season in high school when everything seemed to click—academically, socially, or athletically. Maybe it was a time in your faith when God felt especially close and alive.

For our high school students who are away this weekend at Winter Celebration, I’m sure many of them would say that their time at Eagle Eyrie with other high school Christians is a mountaintop experience. And the tragedy—or at least what *feels* like a tragedy—is that these moments never last long enough.

The vacation ends. The final buzzer sounds. The retreat comes to a close. The moment passes. And like Peter, we try to hang on. We try to preserve the experience. We wish we could stay on the mountain just a little longer.

Why do we want these moments to last forever? Why do we bargain for one more minute overlooking the Beartooth Mountains? Why did Peter want to build houses on the mountain? Why do we work so hard to prolong these experiences?

It’s because these moments transform us. We have our own *metamorphoomai*.

But we also resist coming down—using denial, control, or distraction—because the mountain feels safe, and the valley demands trust.

For Peter, James, John—and even Jesus—coming down the mountain meant trouble. It meant betrayal, arrest, trial, beatings, crucifixion, death, and burial. More than the disciples could ever have imagined.

For us, coming down the mountain looks different—but it’s no less real. It’s work and responsibilities. It’s grief and disappointment. It’s the daily grind that plays the same tune day after day.

No matter how badly we want to stay on the mountaintop, we all must come down. Eventually, we must face what waits for us below.

Peter's attempt to preserve the moment is interrupted—not by another disciple, but by God himself. A cloud overshadows them, and a voice speaks: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

The disciples fall to the ground in fear. And then Jesus does something quietly beautiful—he reaches out and touches them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

When they look up, Moses and Elijah are gone. Only Jesus remains. That detail matters. It tells us that Jesus is not simply one voice among many—he is the One to whom the Law and the Prophets point.

And then it's time to go down the mountain—away from the dazzling light and onto the road that leads toward the cross.

Just as the disciples had to come down the mountain, so do we. But we do not come down unprepared. It is on the mountain that we are given what we need for the journey ahead.

God's word names Jesus as the beloved Son. Jesus' touch stills fear. And the Spirit sends us back into the world—not alone, but accompanied.

The good news is this: the same Jesus who shines on the mountain walks with us in the valley. He does not remain above, at a safe distance. He goes with us—into ordinary days, hard conversations, suffering, and even death itself.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, may you be transformed by the transforming work of the Triune God, so that when you are called down from the mountain, you trust that Christ is already there—waiting for you, walking with you, and never letting you go.