

REFLECTION February 15TH 2026

'THE RIPPLE EFFECT – CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION'

On mountaintops, amazing and transformative things happen. I know we have some people here today who in the past have really enjoyed walking along tracks. Imagine climbing a high mountain—feeling the wind, seeing the world stretched out below, noticing how quiet or vast it feels at the top. Can you remember when you have been somewhere like that? One of the things that I've heard pilots say when they're flying up there on their own, there's nothing like being up in the air with nothing around you except the clouds and witnessing the sunrise or sunset over the horizon. It's a kind of freedom and awesomeness that's difficult to put into words. A quote, often attributed to Da Vinci says something like "he who has flown across the skies will forever walk the earth seeking to fly again"

In today's story from the Hebrew Bible, Moses, the leader who guided the Israelites out of Egypt, climbs a mountain alone. Moses has listened to the grumbling people, had conversations with God about the best way to continue their journey through the desert with arriving in the Promised Land always their goal. He has already faced many obstacles along the way and now from a heart of love, compassion and great leadership, God is providing the faithful and true servant Moses a set of commandments to help everyone know what God expects from them. Moses' friends wait at the bottom, unsure what is happening above. Imagine watching someone disappear into the clouds and not knowing when or if they will return.

What might that feel like? Worry? Hope? Curiosity? I suppose when the first flight went high up into the clouds everyone below was experiencing those emotions. Frederick Warren Merriam is recognized as the first pilot in Britain to fly through a cloud, achieving this feat in 1912 in a Bristol Box-kite, a daring move when pilots typically stayed within sight of the ground. Louis Paulhan is also noted as potentially being the first to fly above the clouds in January 1910. I doubt either one of those pilots stayed up there away from sight for very long. Not long enough for those on the ground to think they weren't coming down. Flying changed how the world integrates together.

Moses stays on the mountain for forty days and forty nights—more than a month! To the Israelites, God's glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain. A cloud covered the mountain, and Moses entered the cloud – a place where he remained for 40 days.

The number 40 carries consistent symbolism;

Trial and judgment: the great flood in Genesis 7 was caused by rain for 40 days and the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years.

Preparation and Cleansing: Moses stayed on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights and Jonah warned Nineveh for 40 days.

A Generation: The 40 year wilderness wandering represented the passing of a full generation, separating the old from the new

Leadership and Reigns: Moses' life was divided into 40-year segments (40 years in Egypt, 40 in the desert), and kings like David and Solomon reigned for 40 years.

The number 40 marks a transition, where, following the period of waiting or testing, a momentous event or a new era begins.

We can't know exactly what Moses carried down, but his encounter with God changed him forever. Not only did it change Moses forever, but it also changed how society would develop strong faithful communities together.

Sometimes, God chooses one person for a special moment, to turn things around, make things better, the effects ripple out to everyone around them. Not everyone likes or even enjoys the special moment, there will always be those who worry, are encouragingly hopeful, and of course those who are curious

about the positive change that accompanies the person of the special moment. Our story of Moses on the mountain top for 40 days creating special moments and the ripple effect isn't the only special moment in time that we've heard about today.

The special moment mountaintop story in Matthew's reading has been told over and over again. It would have been familiar to the people of Jesus' day and to Jesus' followers and it's still familiar to us today. Matthews story also tells of an awesome experience and glorious encounter on a mountain. We call it the 'Transfiguration' where Jesus shines in radiant glory alongside Moses and Elijah. The disciples' response was one of awe, astonishment,

fear, reverent silence – all of which invites us to wonder a few things. Just how did they know who it was who was with Jesus? They hadn't been introduced to them as they were already long dead, and they hadn't seen a portrait of them either, so how did they know who was with Jesus in the cloud? I don't recall ever reading a description of how they looked from the scriptures, so it can't be from earlier texts. The only way would be due to God's revelation and the broader way that God has spoken to people through history. It's that 'I just know, because God has told me.'

Recognition is anchored in the unfolding plan of salvation. Moses (Law) and Elijah (Prophets) represented the law and the prophets the two major scriptural streams that shaped the teachings of Jesus. When the appearance happens 'Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.' the disciples are confronted with the continuity and fulfillment of all God's promises. The recognition, then, isn't a memory game as we know it, but a Spirit-infused discernment that we all want to experience. Moses and Elijah are identified because their presence corresponds to the divine story we find with Jesus from his beginning to his resurrection. In Peter's impulse to build tabernacles, the disciples are poster-ready for a moment where heaven's story intersects with the earth's reality; their recognition is a moment of clarity of the substance of what we know of our faith, even before it becomes a moment of personal memory.

The recognition is made known to us by the Word of God and God's voice from the cloud. The Father's (God) pronouncement, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" puts Jesus within the honoured company of Moses and Elijah and better still redirects our attention to Jesus as the culminating revelation of God. Moses and Elijah gain their identification as 'great ones' not because of a face or a familiar presence, but because their roles in the scripture point towards the Messiah, King, Emmanuel, God with us, Shepherd, Jesus. The disciples' capacity to recognise their significance arises as they behold Jesus in all his radiant glory and hear the Father's imperative to listen to him. In that moment, recognition happens through God's instructions (Commandments). God teaches the disciples to see rightly, not by a searching through a gallery of portraits, or looking for a written description, but by a lens of scripture and Sonship.

One of the things we can gather from the scene in the passage suggests that knowledge of recognisable people can come through spiritual perception rather than visual familiarity. We will each have our own image of Mary and Martha, not because we've seen either of them, but because of what we know about them from the scriptures. Matthew models a mode of knowledge that depends on the Holy Spirit granting insight. The cloud – an ancient symbol of God's presence (the cloud that guided them through the desert) overshadows them, and a voice interrupts, quite the clarifying moment in time. The disciples' fear is real, but their fear is transformed into worship and trust as they're given a glimpse of the Triune drama: Father, Son, and Spirit, at work through history, culminating in Jesus' mission. The recognition by which they identify Moses and Elijah is therefore inseparable from their own call to follow Jesus into his passion and resurrection.

So, what can we do with respect for these readings? We are gifted an opportunity to take a hard look at considering our own ability to recognise the truth about God. We may not meet Moses or Elijah in the flesh, yet scripture, a lived faith community, and the inner witness of the Spirit form our sight. Are we, like the disciples, turning to Jesus as the central figure for understanding scripture, the one who calls us to hear and follow him? The Transfiguration persuades us that true recognition doesn't come from our memories or produced images, but from God's gracious act of unveiling Jesus as the one who fulfills the Law and the Prophets, and who invites us into transformative worship.

In our various stages of life, I wonder if you would think back over your lifetime to look and see the special moments in time when you witnessed the transformative light of Christ piercing through circumstances offering you hope and love for a future quite different from what you were expecting. Can you see the ripple effect on other people, and feel the freedom from your Spirit led decisions that changed everything. The joy you felt when you realised you had seen the shining light, observed the Mosaic laws and took note of the prophet was something that couldn't be held in tight but you needed to share so you could watch others blossom. All of these things have been given to us freely by the One who loves you deeply, honestly authentically and will be with you always.

Amen