

+++ In the Name of Jesus +++

Date: 15 Feb 2026 (The Transfiguration of Our Lord, series A)

Title: “Seeing Our Saviour”

Text: Exodus 24:8-18 *and* Matthew 17:1-9

Exodus 24:8-18

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’

⁹ Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

¹² The LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.’

¹³ Then Moses set out with Joshua his assistant, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. ¹⁴ He said to the elders, ‘Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.’

¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1-9

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid.’ ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus only.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

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For a while now, the most prominent politicians in many places around the world have been people who purposely position themselves as disrupters. Here in Canada, and in many other Commonwealth countries, the principle of “peace, order, and good government” is built right into our legal system to ensure that we all benefit from a *stable* society. But stability, *to some*, is meaningless these days. Their goal is disruption—a clear and decisive *break* with the past.

What about Jesus? Was he a disrupter—or a continuity man? Was he a revolutionary, or a reactionary? Was he a prophet who wanted to shake things up, or a priest who wanted to keep them all the

same? Was Jesus our Saviour more of a progressive (who pushed for change), or a conservative (who appreciated and wanted to hang onto everything that was good in the past)?

Well, sometimes I think the tendency is to grab hold of *one* end of each of those pairs of opposites and say, “There—*that’s* Jesus!”

So, for instance, at the time of the Reformation, *some* of the Reformers looked back and thought that they saw Jesus carrying out the same kind of “radical reformation” in 1st-century Judaism that they were trying to carry out in 16th century Catholicism. Didn’t Jesus violently flip over all the tables in the Temple, at the start of his ministry? Didn’t he criticize the religious leaders of his day (relentlessly!) for their hypocrisy and corruption?

At the same time, the Catholic leaders of the Counter-Reformation looked back and thought they saw Jesus *defending* the established traditions of his day. They were quick to point out his deep and abiding *conservatism*—as we heard last Sunday (for instance), his insistence that he “**had not come to overthrow the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them.**” (Matt 5:17)

Was Jesus a disrupter, or a defender, of the status quo? “Would the real Jesus please stand up?”

This is a pressing question for us, too—not just our ancestors back at the time of the Reformation. On the one hand (the *left* hand, I suppose), some churches (and some individual Christians) these days have very little use for many of the traditional practices and beliefs that Christianity as a whole has been hanging-onto for almost 2000 years.

- “The Bible isn’t really the Word of God,” they say.
- “Jesus may or may not have risen from the dead.”
- “Traditional gender roles and many different aspects of personal and sexual ethics have to go.”

And so on. People who say such things might not *quite* be saying, “Burn it all down!”—but the disruption they cause both to the faith of individual Christians and to the unity of the body of Christ, is remarkable (and, to many of us, profoundly unsettling).

On the other hand, the *right-hand* end of today’s Christian spectrum sometimes just “pays lip-service” to a weak and frankly somewhat distorted form of traditional Christianity, without really understanding, or grasping, its content. “What do you believe?,” we might ask such a person. Their answer might be something like, “Law and order, free enterprise, traditional family roles, and ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’!” Well, to some extent, all of those themes are indeed *found in* the Bible, to some extent. They’re just not *at the heart* of the Bible, which centres its message around sin and forgiveness... brokenness and grace... our profound need for a Saviour, and the great good news that God has given us a Saviour, who lived and died and rose again to rescue us from sin and death.

So, as I mentioned, the tendency at both ends of this spectrum is to grab ahold of Jesus and *try* to stuff him into our favourite box. Either he’s way out there at that end, as a “burn it all down” radical—*OR* he’s way over there at that end, as a “never change anything” reactionary. It hardly ever occurs to us to see Jesus as both!

And yet, from what we see many places in the Gospels, Jesus *was* both. Jesus our Saviour was not *just* a radical or a reactionary... a leftist or a rightist... a liberal or a conservative. He was “one of a kind,” combining in his one person *many things* that you and I usually think of as totally irreconcilable.

- Fully God, *and* fully man.
- Totally sinless, in his divine nature, *and* the sin-bearer of us all, in his human nature.
- Sacrificial victim, who was offered-up to God on the altar of the cross to pay for our sin, *and* the one High Priest in all of history who was able to *make* that once-and-for-all offering for us.

In today's Gospel reading, we see Peter, James, and John grappling with another pair of opposites that were actually *not* so totally opposite at all. What happened to Jesus there on that "mountain of transfiguration" *did not* fit, easily or completely, into either of the boxes they were tempted to jam him into.

- To some extent, his transfiguration was totally consistent with what God had already done through Moses, centuries before.
- In other ways, what was happening there that day really was totally new.

Both of those patterns—of similarity *and* of difference—jump out at us pretty clearly when we compare what happened to Jesus in today's Gospel reading with what happened to Moses in today's Old Testament reading. In fact, I discovered 7 specific points of similarity-*and*-difference, between these two readings. Together, what they suggest is that Jesus was both a disrupter *and* a continuity-man—*not just* one or the other. In a very special way that was "his alone," Jesus was both.

The first point of comparison between Jesus and Moses, as I went through our Gospel reading carefully, was the *timing* of the events that both Exodus and Matthew describe. Back in Exodus, "**the cloud [of God's presence] covered the mountain for six days,**" before "**the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.**" (Exod 24:15) In Matthew, it was "*after six days*" that Jesus "**took Peter, James, and John with him... up a high mountain.**" (Matt 17:1)

The reason Matthew points this out, I think, is because it creates such a strong connection between Moses and Jesus. (This is point #2.) Jesus, in fact, is portrayed in many ways (in Matthew's Gospel) as "the *new* Moses"—especially because of his teaching. Unlike the other Gospel-writers, Matthew arranges most of Jesus' teaching into 5 big blocks. And the *first* of those blocks (interestingly enough) is "the Sermon *on the Mount*," which we heard from on the last 2 Sundays.

- Back in Exodus, you see, God gave Moses *his* "**Law**"... on "**tablets of stone**"... that later inspired Moses himself to write "the 5 *Books of Moses*." (24:12)
- Here in Matthew, we see God giving us *the Gospel*... on a *different* mountain... through the "new Moses" whose teaching Matthew was later inspired to organize into "5 big speeches."

Was that a disruption, or a fulfilment? Some of both!

A 3rd point of comparison is the fact that Moses set out (for the top of "his" mountain) with 3 assistants: "**Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu.**" (24:9) Jesus had 3 assistants too—"Peter, James, and John"—the same "inner circle" he often took along, when all 12 of his disciples would have been too many. (17:1) Three... and three. More continuity there, than disruption.

Comparison #4: The whole time God was up there on that first mountain with Moses, God *hid* his personal presence "**within a cloud**" that "**covered**" the whole scene. (24:15) When Jesus, by contrast, was up on this second mountain, the "**bright cloud**" that signalled his Father's presence came down only when his Father was actually speaking. (17:5) In both cases, you see, a cloud both *concealed* and *revealed* the presence of God—that's a strong and obvious point of continuity. And yet: the presence of *Jesus* (on that second mountain) was *already* the presence of God—which is maybe why God the Father only "needed" to come down, himself, for that short little cameo. So: overall, more disruption *and* more continuity. Both!

Point 5 is the fact that the glorious presence of *God the Father* on Mt. Sinai "**looked like a consuming fire on top of [that whole] mountain.**" (24:17) On the second mountain, it was just the *face of God the Son* that "**shone like the sun, [while] his clothes became as white as the light.**" (17:2) There, you see, God was not just showing up *externally*, out there in nature itself, but *personally*, in the body of Jesus. Here too: things were exactly the same, only different! (Right?)

A 6th observation is that both of these occasions were “*speaking events*,” not silent charades. In Exodus, God gave Moses some very detailed instructions on what to do, in order to pass along his Word to his people. **“Come up to me,”** God said, **“and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments that I have written for [my people’s] instruction.”** (24:12) In Matthew, God’s instructions to Jesus’s 3 disciples were simpler, but also a lot farther-reaching. **“This is my Son, whom I love,”** God said; **“With him, I am well-pleased! Listen to him!”** (5) The first time around, God’s instructions had been pretty limited: “Do these particular things, and you will live.” The second time, the focus was not on doing certain things, but on following a certain person. In neither case were God’s people free to do whatever they wanted. But the *types* of obedience God demanded in both cases were totally different. (In simple terms: “Law *versus* Gospel.”)

Finally, a seventh point of comparison is that in both of these situations, God’s attitude toward his people was overwhelmingly positive. On Mt. Sinai, even though Moses and his helpers were just as sinful as everybody else, **“God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites: *instead, they saw God, and ate and drank!*”** (24:11) On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were so aware of their sin (in the presence of God) that **“they fell face down to the ground, terrified.”** (6) Then, it was *Jesus* who recognized their fear, and **“came and touched them, and said, ‘Get up; don’t be afraid!’”** (7) As different in many ways as the Old and New Testaments are, both of them show us a God who is (in his very nature) **“a compassionate and gracious God,”** as we hear in Exodus 34—a God who is **“slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness—maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.”** (Exodus 34:6-7)

All 7 of these points of similarity and difference... continuity and change... disruption and doubling-down—all of these points *together*, help us understand *why* this second event we’re hearing about, here in today’s Gospel, wrapped up the way that it did. **“When they looked up,”** Matthew tells us, **“Peter, James, and John saw no one except Jesus only.”** (8) Yes, Moses *and* Elijah had been there for a while. (4) God the Father “came-and-went” as well. But Jesus was the *only* one they still *needed* to see—and *did* see. Because he was both *continuous* with everything God the Father had been “doing” in the Old Testament, and also its great *disrupter*—**“Jesus only”** was the only one *they*, and *all of us Christians*, need to see, follow, believe in, and trust.

On the one hand—absolutely, Jesus was *totally* continuous with the Old Testament.

- He did not destroy that Law his Father gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai; instead, our Saviour kept that Law perfectly.
- He did not abandon the religion of the Old Testament, either, but he taught in the synagogues of Galilee and worshipped in the Temple at Jerusalem.
- He reached out, first of all, **“to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”**—and wanted more than anything, that *they*, his fellow Jews, would *recognize* him as the Saviour God had always been promising to send. And when they, on their side, called Jesus titles like “Rabbi” and “Son of David”... and anointed him with oil... and laid palm-branches on the road in front of him—that’s exactly what they were doing. The people of Israel *were* recognizing and accepting his claim to be the Messiah.

On the other hand, it’s equally true that Jesus *disrupted* that whole system completely! As soon as he showed up, the faithfulness that God was *really* looking for, was no longer a matter of obeying **“the law and commandments”** he gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. (24:12) If the Jewish people (or any of us, for that

matter) *could* have done that perfectly—great! But now that it was obvious to everyone (Jesus *and* them, together) that they *couldn't* do that... now, God's plan meant trusting (and following) Jesus.

- The sacrifices that Israelites themselves had always been making, to pay for their sins, were now going to be made by “**Jesus only**”—once-for-all, in his own body, on the cross.
- The promised-land Jesus was leading everyone to, as “the new Moses,” was not just the real-estate of Palestine, but the “new creation” of heaven.
- The life that stretches out in front of God's people would no longer be just “**70 or 80 years, full of trouble and sorrow**” (as the Psalmist put it), but an eternity where “**there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain—for the old order of things has passed away.**” (Ps 90:10, Rev 21:4)

So then: As you and I follow Jesus today, we should *expect* that our discipleship will *likewise* involve *some* elements of continuity *and* some elements of change.

- We come here every Sunday as burdened and broken sinners—and guess what?—we're *still* sinners when we leave this place and go home, only now we have been forgiven and set free from our sin!
- We're committed to *following* Jesus, in a *new* and *better* pattern of life—even though we still to on living in the same homes and households, doing the same jobs and filling the same roles.
- We do all of this as “new people,” whose citizenship is in heaven—even as we also go on living here in this world as “exiles,” subject to all the rules and limitations of life in this world.

The same thing is true for us, you see, that was *first* true for Peter, James, and John.

- There is only *one* Person who can lead us through all the challenging, difficult, distressing and confusing times, and tensions, and challenges that we face. “**Jesus only.**”
- He is the only one Peter, James, and John “**saw... as they were coming down the mountain**”—following Jesus on his road to the cross. (8, 9)
- So let us resolve, too, to “*see*” *and follow* “**Jesus only**”—every time we leave his presence here, and head back into everyday life.

In the name of Jesus, dear friends: AMEN!