

Matthew 17:1-9 The Best Thing Ever
February 15, 2026

Three weeks ago we were unable to have worship because of a great snowstorm and a deep freeze that hindered everyone; shutting down the schools for a week and making life a little more dangerous than it normally is. The past few days it has melted away and leaves only the remnant of piles of snow left behind by the plows, which linger. The cleansing rain brings its blessing to the earth.

Today is the last Sunday before the beginning of the Lenten season. It is known as Transfiguration Day, referring to the account in Matthew's gospel, also in Mark and Luke, of when Jesus, in the busiest period of his earthly career, took Peter, James, and John up on a mountaintop where he was changed before them.

They saw his face shining like the sun and his clothes white as light. They saw Moses and Elijah, the great lawgiver and prophet from Israel's history having a conversation with Jesus like it was Tuesday lunch.

What is striking, of course, is the response of Peter, who would go on to become one of the great apostles of the Church. It reflected a silly naïveté and immaturity in the faith all too common in the world of people and things.

He said that he thought it was good to be in that space. He suggested they build three shelters, presumably so they could stay there awhile, although

why not six, one for Peter and James and John. In Luke's gospel we are told that he did not know what he was saying and it was probably true.

The event never stopped unfolding before them. As if Peter wasn't there and had said nothing at all, they heard the divine voice repeat in the same words from the baptism, the affirmation of Jesus, "this is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well-pleased," and then added, "listen to him."

Then they were blinded by a light and fell down, and when they looked up, they were back in what appeared to them as normal reality. They had been given a glimpse of the heavenly Jesus, just a glimpse. In the moment, at least, Peter did not know what to do with it.

Clearly the gift of the Transfiguration was given them as an assurance because of what was ahead, which would test their faith and resolve. They were to keep marching to their own majestic and tragic destiny, one that blessed their lives and ours, and the world's, as hard experiences sometimes do.

Each year we look upon the Transfiguration anew, taking our reading this year from the Gospel of Matthew. From time-to-time we also catch glimpses of the divine splendor, it is only temporary, and until we are called home, these moments come and go, meant to strengthen and encourage us for the remainder of the journey.

Little transfigurations occur; like a sunset or a trip to the ocean or a new friendship made. Throughout the ebbing and flowing of life, we often experience times of peace and rest, of assurance and encouragement.

The high moments of the life of faith accompany us through the hardships that always threaten and sometimes come, and like the cross, to our great wonder, often bless us as well.

We too, would like to stay in these moments, or ones like it. As it is, one can not stay for long. There is no time to build houses, even if only intended to be temporary. Rather, we find ourselves down here on the ground in the low country in the muck and mud of this earthy life.

Yet this element of experience must be emphasized. It comes near the end of Jesus' earthly career, which culminates in the crucifixion *which is proclaimed as his glorification*.

The three disciples are given a vision of the heavenly Christ just as the greatest trial they would face approached. It happened on the threshold of the worst thing that could possibly happen. It is hard to wrap our minds around the idea that this brutal form of capital punishment is the moment of his highest glory.

It was meant to give them a strengthening of faith, and a firm confidence for the path ahead, a path that would be characterized by pain and failure and disappointment. That is why, all these centuries later,

the day set aside to consider the Transfiguration event immediately precedes the season of Lent, and the advance of the Passion.

The general truth revealed is that the events of history and the happenings in our own personal histories are not the dominant factors in our lives (a statement what goes against conventional wisdom nowadays). *The history of God's action in the world is the dominant factor*, and is not subordinated to the so-called, "secular," history, but is transcendent and triumphant over it because the Lord of Heaven is also the Lord of Earth, and the Lord of all its histories.

For Peter, James, and John, who could not possibly understand either the Transfiguration itself or the events that occurred on its heels, at least not until they came to a place where they could reflect on the experience, and when they did, at least for them, the memory of this event became an anchor that allowed them to persevere, it helped provide them a secure foundation in unthinkable times, and enabled them the experience of a rich and meaningful life.

May I suggest that it will also allow *us* to re-consider the hard experiences of our lives, and the happy ones too, because both before and after, and into the middle of them, has entered a strong and miraculous vision of eternity, in order to strengthen and encourage us to persist in our faith, and remain moored to it no matter the immediate context of our lives.

It has always been the conviction of the Christian Faith that the best thing that ever happened to the world, and to us in our individual lives, happened when Jesus was crucified by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at a Passover celebration those 2,000 years ago. *That was the best thing ever.*

There are two aspects to God's glory: the cross and the resurrection and Jesus, in both cases high and lifted up, embodies God's glory. It is not surprising that the crucified Jesus is held up as its pinnacle.

Whatever was the intention of Pilate or of the Sanhedrin and the members of the Jewish leadership that recommended the sentence of death to Pilate, even if we give them the benefit of the doubt and say that they thought some tragic good might result, or at least some tragic evil might be avoided, in the end, for Jesus, they meant *his* harm.

And this harm *was the best thing thing ever*, the saving act for the human race, in which is our Redemption. Like with Joseph and his brothers, at the end when he made himself known to them, he told them that *they* meant it for harm; but *God* meant it for our good, and the good of the world.

Imagine if Jesus had allowed Peter to build those three houses; one for Moses, representing the law, one for Elijah representing the prophets, and one for Jesus, representing whatever misguided idea of messiahship they carried around in their thoughts, one without a cross in it, so they could all stay on the

mountain, doing no one any much good, simply because for a moment heaven came down and its glory shone bright.

Then the Passion; and on the other side the glory of Christ is born in us, and we listen to him; when he tells us to come and follow, when he says to love each other, and our neighbor, and even our enemy, when he says don't worry about your life, that if we seek our lives we will lose them, but if we lose our lives for his sake, then we will find them, when he says life is more than what we think, consider the lilies . .

resulting in *our* devotion and the offering our bodies and living sacrifices, the sacrifice of goodness, of courage and of service, of compassion and empathy, of a renewed mind and a heart overcome by God's peace which even in the middle of life's storms guards and sustains, and enables and empowers the doing of God's will.

Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down

and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes,

trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." 25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." 26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. 28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be

turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

[Back](#)[Home](#)