

Sermons by Email: Rev. Sean Bell, Resurrection Lutheran Church, Saskatoon.
Transfiguration Sunday, Feb 15, 2026.

Sermon — Rev. Sean Bell - Resurrection Lutheran Church - Transfiguration Sunday

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

On Tuesday morning, as I try to do most weeks, I sat down with coffee and a blank screen to begin writing this sermon.

Transfiguration Sunday.

Radiant light.

Holy mystery.

A mountain wrapped in cloud.

It was shaping up to be a perfectly lovely sermon.

A peaceful stop before Ash Wednesday and the work of Lent...

Like climbing a mountain and taking some time to pause and appreciate the view.

I'm a lot like Peter... let's set up a tent... and a hammock... and stay at this moment for a bit... let's rest in the glow of God's presence and peace...

And then, after lunch was finished, the horrible news came over the radio.

Reports from a high school in British Columbia.

The warm bubble popped... and over the next day... reports of a school shooting...

Gunfire?

Lockdown?

Students sheltering in classrooms?

Parents waiting outside for word?

Sirens?

Nothing good... and too close for comfort.

The kind of news that makes everything else stop.

Scrambling from web page to web page looking for updates and information.

The thin veneer of 'this kind of thing doesn't happen here' shattered.

Tragedies of this sort are “stop and notice moments.”

For many directly involved, this is the kind of news that divides time into before and after.

Or maybe it triggers a part of your own story where similar uncertainty and fear were close.

And suddenly the easy and comforting words.

The warm moment with Jesus...
with a glowing face and shining garments...
It all felt far away.

Almost unreal. Because when violence erupts in a school hallway, what we want is not radiance.

What we want is intervention. Prevention. Protection.

We want a God who stops the bullets... we don't want to be in the place of fear and death.

In the first draft of this sermon, I was exploring the idea from Dr. Mark Throntveit's who spoke of Transfiguration as the first of two mountains in the Gospel...

Key story moments of Jesus on the Journey to the cross.
The Transfiguration's radiant glory with Moses and Elijah

versus ...

Calvary's darkness with two thieves.

Both mountain tops declare "This is my son," ... and it is the same Jesus...

But Dr. Mark pointed out that on one mountain is the Jesus we want versus the Jesus we get.

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On one mountain, Jesus is transfigured. His face altered. His clothes dazzling white. Moses and Elijah standing beside him...

Moses and Elijah are both mountain men...

Moses, whose own face once shone after speaking with God.

Elijah, who met the Lord not in wind or fire, but in sheer silence.

It is a mountaintop of glory.

And Peter immediately wants to build tents.

"Let us make three dwellings," he says.

It's easy to laugh at Peter...

But I'm not sure he's wrong to want to stay.

When the glory of God is that close...

when everything is clear and bright and unmistakably holy...

of course you want to hold onto it.

Maybe it's hospitality that drives his desire to put up a tent... meeting guests you make them comfortable.

Maybe Peter is a little desperate to make the moment last...

If we can build something here... a tent, a tabernacle, a shrine, a structure...

Then maybe....

Maybe we can keep this version of Jesus.

The radiant one.

The strong one.

The unmistakably divine one.

This is the Jesus we want.

But while Peter is still speaking, the cloud overshadows them. And the voice interrupts him:

"This is my Son, my Beloved. Listen to him."

Listen to him...

Which makes me wonder... what has Jesus just been saying?

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Just days before this moment, Jesus told them plainly that he must suffer. That he must be rejected. That he must be killed...

The voice from heaven does not say, "Do your best to stay here."
It does not say, "Build something permanent."
It says, "Listen to him."

Listen to the one who is emptying himself for the life of others.
Listen to the one who is speaking of love and forgiveness.
Listen to the one who is walking toward Jerusalem.

Because there is another mountain.
A darker one.
A hill outside the city walls.
No shining garments. Ripped and bloody garments.
No honored prophets. This is where prophets are killed.
No bright cloud. In face darkness falls...

No honoured guests... just:
Soldiers. Mockery. A wooden cross. Two criminals.
A weeping and grieving mother whose son is being killed.

And yet... on both mountains... it is the same Son.

On the mountain of Transfiguration, the voice declares him beloved.
On the mountain of Calvary on the cross, that beloved-ness is not revoked.

The two mountains are not opposites.

The glory on the first mountain is not canceled by the suffering on the second.

This is not a different Jesus.

This is the same Jesus...
seen clearly once in light, and seen clearly again in love that refuses to turn away from suffering.

And this idea of Jesus walking off the mountain of transfiguration
Returning to the sick and suffering.
Walking towards Jerusalem and the Cross on Mount Calvary.
... this is the Jesus we get... and it's the Jesus we need in a week like this.

(Because) When violence breaks into ordinary life...
into classrooms and hallways and communities...
we are confronted again with how fragile everything feels.
How quickly joy can shatter.
How little control we actually have.

When the world is scary and upside down... we long for the mountaintop Jesus.
The powerful one.
The untouchable one.
The one who would sweep in and overpower every threat.
This is the Jesus we want

But the Jesus we get walks toward the wounded places.
He does not stand far off from human violence.
He does not answer violent wounding with greater violence.
He enters the wounding.

On Calvary, God does not explain suffering.
God absorbs it. Takes it all in.

On Calvary, God does not justify violence.
God exposes it.

On Calvary, God does not remain distant.
God participates... and in participating, breaks the final claim of violence and death.

If God defeated violence by superior force, violence would still rule.

If God avoided death altogether, death would still terrify.

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But by entering death...

by allowing love to go all the way into it...

God robs death of it's ultimate power.

As we read scriptures at funerals we say "Oh death where is your sting?"

God revealed in Jesus... incarnationally in Jesus.... gives these disciples glimpse on the first mountain.

The light shining from Jesus is the first flickers of resurrection light...

flickering ahead of time...

Hinting at what is going to happen as Jesus returns to the valleys...

It is the promise of Easter breaking through before Good Friday has even happened.

And this week... when we were at a funeral, or watching political violence, or mourning from a distance with the parents and people of that small town in BC...

When we arrive at the mountain we never wanted... Calvary's cross echoed:

In the hospital room,

In the funeral home,

In the place marked by police tape,

In the Ash Wednesday smudge on the forehead that is waiting for each of us at the beginning of Lent.

... we are not arriving alone.

The same beloved Son is there.

The one who shone like the sun

is the one whose body was broken.

The one whom the voice called "Chosen"

is the one who cried out in the full raw power of death.

And still... and always... beloved....

And here is where the joy begins...

not loud or naïve pretending that everything is glowing and fine... but resonating with the deeper movement of God in Christ...

Because if the beloved Son can walk through the darkest mountain and rise,
then no mountain of ours is final.

The Transfiguration does not promise that we will be spared suffering.
It promises that suffering does not get the last word as Christ is
beloved... and we are beloved...

The light the disciples saw is the truth of who Jesus is... and who he remains...
even when the world grows dim.

And we are told to listen to him.
Listen to the one who forgives.
Listen to the one who gathers.
Listen to the one who feeds us with his own life.
Listen to the one who says, "Do not be afraid."

Today we stand on the mountain of Transfiguration looking towards Dark
Calvary...

We glimpse glory.
We know suffering.
We walk toward Lent.
But we walk with the beloved Son.
And we will arrive at Easter Resurrection.

And that means even now...
even in a world that can break our hearts as the news reports more
details...

The light is already at work.

The persistent work of God's Spirit among us.

This light is kind of light that shines in darkness,
and the darkness does not overcome it.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.