

*St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven*  
*February 15, 2026*

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." ~Matthew 17:1-9

I love the old story told of St. John's in the Wilderness, a centuries-old monastery known for the deep devotion of its members and its rigor. Members stay for decades, which means openings are rare. When there *is* an opening, candidates are whittled down to three who are chosen to visit St. John's. An elder monk greets them each at a small window for a brief conversation. As the story goes, after the recent death of a longtime brother, three aspirants arrived and were interviewed in turn. The first came to the window and said "You know, I think being at St. John's would be a wonderful natural extension of the work I've done over many years founding several orphanages, among a good number of other things." The brother listened politely, nodded, and thanked him for coming. The second came to the window and said "I wasn't sure this was really for me, but my friends and colleagues at, you know, the Vatican, really encouraged me. You might have seen their letters of recommendation." Again, the brother smiled, nodded, and thanked him for his time. Finally the third candidate came to window. He said, "Hi- my name is Bill." After a few moments of silence the brother looked up, nodded, opened the door, and said, "Bill- welcome to St. John's."

It's a story, of course, about the essence of discipleship- about what it means to be a disciple and what it doesn't mean. Discipleship, we know, isn't about credentials and connections- it's about following and being transformed, transfigured over time. It's about presenting ourselves exactly as we are and opening ourselves to all that might be possible for us. What I want to suggest in the few minutes that we have together is that the beautiful, radiant gospel passage we just heard, known as The Transfiguration, is ultimately *also* about discipleship- what it means to be a disciple and what it doesn't mean. The transfiguration of Jesus on a mountaintop in the presence of Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John is a story about a lot of things, of course, and one can't help but get caught up at least a bit in the glory and splendor of the moment. But it's ultimately not meant to dazzle. It's meant to instruct and inspire; it's meant to illuminate. We always hear it at the end of the Epiphany season. It punctuates the season. And as Matthew tells it, it punctuates Jesus's season with his disciples, helping them to see fully what they have only been able to see partially. Discipleship, they finally see, isn't an arrival and it isn't an achievement. It isn't an inside track, even this special trip up the mountain; it isn't special access to status or power or favor. It's being struck again by awe and wonder in the presence of God and being reminded once again to listen. To listen to him. And then to rise up once again, pick back up, and follow.

The disciples want to hold on to this moment, to mark it as arrival, and in a sense who wouldn't? They appear to be a select group of what's already a select group; they're led up a mountain by the master and see what no one else has seen; and what's more they see it in the presence of the ultimate luminaries Elijah and Moses, long dead yet apparently here quite alive, the prophets all talking amongst themselves. Why not join the chat, build dwellings and call it a day? Instead, they are struck numb and brought fully back to the reality of the present moment, pulled up from the ground by the one who has so much more to show them if only they will follow and look and see, so much more to teach them if only they will listen and hear and learn. This story beckons to us at the end of the Epiphany season along our own pilgrim way as we've taken these short few weeks to follow Jesus through the Galilean plains, hearing his words, seeing him heal and make whole, learning what it might mean to follow him, truly to follow him.

And what have we learned? This is chance to look back for a moment and take it all in. What have we learned, and what do we learn so pointedly today about being disciples, about what it means to be his followers, to be People of the Way?

I want to suggest that it's at least two things that we've seen and learned, and the first takes us right back to the season's very first week. That's the moment when Jesus began to gather disciples and launch his ministry. Remember what happened? It was quite amazing, really- Jesus saw some fishermen, said "follow me," and — remember the word? — *immediately* they put down their nets and followed him. Immediately? That's the word; it's the word the other gospels use as well, and does it make any sense? Well, it really only makes sense *if they were that ready to go*. If they were that ready to be set free, to be liberated. Discipleship, my friends, we've learned is first and foremost a setting free, a release. The call from Jesus is a call out of all that holds us captive. It's a liberation from all that holds us back, just as it was for those first few who, yes, rose up immediately, unhesitatingly to say *yes* to this new freedom. And today in this luminous moment perhaps eight or ten months later they and we are reminded of this release once again. Release from the need for status, rank and privilege. Liberation from our attachments and all that holds us back. Discipleship, we are shown once again, is freedom; it's liberation, it's a release from captivity.

And second, and finally, now released, now set free, discipleship can be something even more life-giving, even more wonderful for us, once we, along with them, have picked ourselves up off the ground. Because yes, discipleship will be, when we least expect it, a trip up the mountainside, led by the one who knows us better than anyone, to see something we'll never otherwise see. To share even for the briefest of moments the company of the saints who walk alongside us, the ones in whose footsteps we continue to walk. The great poet and theologian Rowan Williams is known more than anything else for his reflection on discipleship and the beautiful word he uses for discipleship at its essence and heart is the place where I'd like to land this today. That word is expectancy. *Expectancy*. For Williams, the state of being a disciple is the is the state of openness and attentiveness that we call expectancy. It's a waiting and watching in hope, an expectant hope for those moments, even brief, of sudden and brilliant light that change us, that take us to a new place, only to attend and wait again. To be a disciple is to live in that expectant hope, knowing that each trip up the mountain leads as it should and as it must simply to the foot of another where once again we open ourselves to all that still awaits us. The transfiguration at its heart is a story of expectancy.

Rowan Williams memorably likens this to birdwatching. I can't help but think of our dear friend Linda Meyer as she spends this gap year with her children on the west coast and posts gorgeous, breathtaking photos of the birds she loves to watch in stillness, in silence, in hopeful anticipation. Yes— discipleship is much like birdwatching. It's long hours spent watching and waiting in the confident and expectant hope that a moment will come, a moment of release, of beauty, of new heights and horizons. It's not the quick inside line we sometimes want and it's so much more than that and that's what this luminous season we call Epiphany hopes to teach us each time it comes around. Discipleship is liberation. It's expectant hope. We are disciples as we remember that every moment of every day is rich and ripe and full and fragrant with divine presence and beauty and love waiting to break in, calling us to transfiguring new life. And it starts so simply. Hi, my name is Alan. I'm here to be set free. Lead me wherever you might take me, today and always, maybe even up a mountainside. Thanks be to God. Amen.