

Rev. Lisa Schrott

February 15, 2026

Matthew 17:1-8 and 2 Peter 1:16-21

A Lamp Shining in a Dark Place

Our second scripture reading this morning comes from the book of Second Peter. This is not a book we often hear from on Sunday mornings. It is a short letter and there are only two passages that appear in the three year cycle of scriptures known as the Revised Common Lectionary. Scholars believe it is the latest writing in the New Testament, written about 130 – 140 or so C.E. Since the apostle Peter died around 64–67 C.E. we know that Peter is not the author of the letter. Rather, it was written by someone desiring the authority of Peter, providing a final message, encouragement and advice in his name.¹ While it is short, the letter is full of Biblical references – Old Testament stories and words of the prophets, as well as details from Christ’s life like baptism, transfiguration and the resurrection. The letter is structured to remind the early Christian community about staying true to God’s word and the Good News of who Christ is, to not be swayed by false teachings and false prophets. So hear now these words from 2 Peter 1:16-21 that retell the story of the transfiguration of Jesus to a new community of believers.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. **The Word of God for the people of God.**
Thanks be to God.

For the last week or so, I have been obsessing about lamps. I took note (and a few pictures) of lighting fixtures at airports as I was traveling, at a church and the seminary and restaurants I visited in the Atlanta area. From harsh office fluorescents to funky vertical strips to bare hanging bulbs, I have been attending to the sources of light that often we don’t notice or that fade into the background. You might think it was because I was meditating about this scripture, which shares that “You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place.” But alas, I confess my lamp pondering comes from a less spiritual place. Just before I left for a week of study leave, Carl Lira, Frank Hatfield, and Bruce Timmons and I met with a lighting consultant to discuss ways we can enhance our facility with new or

¹ Raymond E. Brown. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Doubleday, 1997. p762

modified lighting in the sanctuary, fellowship hall and chapel. Frank arranged for a member of the MSU Interior Design faculty to share a PowerPoint presentation on fixture styles. So I have been searching for cool pendants, drum shades, rings, chandeliers, and slim LEDs that can function as uplights or downlights or ambient light or focused lights. And you thought Pastors spent all their time reading the Bible!

It has been illuminating to say the least. And in that way the Holy Spirit seems to act, very appropriate in the week before Transfiguration Sunday. I have been thinking a lot about how far we have come since Epiphany Sunday on January 4 and how far we have to go for the journey ahead in Lent, which begins this week on Ash Wednesday. During this Epiphany season we have been considering how images of water and light are used in scripture to help us embody our faith. Basic elements of our world – and of the world of those who came before us – elements needed for survival. Maybe not quite as much frozen water as we experienced this January – but oh what a difference the sunlight makes. The dark, dreary and gray days of winter, with the shadows of the afternoon coming way too soon, are gradually being replaced by a little more light each day. This year has been especially bleak, as the harshness of the weather has matched a political climate where hatred, violence and lack of respect for our common values has been ever present. And we are facing an unknown future.

This is a similar situation as the disciples and the early church were facing. A few minutes ago, Judi read the traditional passage for Transfiguration Sunday from the Gospel of Matthew. Just prior to our passage this morning, we hear that Jesus had begun to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the rulers and on the third day be raised. He tells them that if they wish to follow him they must take up their cross, for those who want to save their life will lose it and those will lose their life for his sake will find it. And if the disciples were struggling to understand the significance of what this means, Jesus shares with Peter, James, and John just what lies ahead. Death does not have the last word. There is light and life that will transform the dust and debris and lingering shadows of the empire into a realm of justice and mercy. As one commentator has noted, “The Transfiguration’s light, then, acts as a kind of reassurance for Peter, John, and James (and for the rest of us!). It’s as if Matthew is saying: We’re now making the turn toward Golgotha, and that means descending into the valley of the shadow of death. But fear not! Keep this astonishing, mysterious mountaintop story in mind as we go. Carry it like a torch, for it can help show the way — not least because it gives us a glimpse of where all this is headed...”² And where was it headed? Well it was headed into the formation of a community of believers we now call the church, which continues to be a lamp shining in the dark places.

As I mentioned before I read our second scripture, the letter of Second Peter was written about 100 years after Christ’s death. A lot can happen in a 100 years. Some of it was positive

² SALT Project. Lectionary Commentary for Transfiguration Sunday. <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/2/18/transfiguration-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-transfiguration-sunday>

– communities of faith solidified, living into the call to be the body of Christ and caring for each other. And some of it was not so positive. While initial divisions between the Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus had healed, new divisions had popped up over theological issues. One of the issues the early church was struggling with was the definition of faith. Writing fairly shortly after the death of Jesus, the apostle Paul defined faith as trust in what God has done in Christ. As time passed, the understanding of faith as a set of beliefs grew stronger. The author of Second Peter is seeking to encourage the faith of those who did not know Christ directly, by writing as one who had been there at the transfiguration event. The author says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

The author is saying trust me – trust us – when we tell you that Jesus is Son of God, full of majesty. This is not a cleverly devised myth. We heard the voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We have confirmed the prophetic message. And then to make it even clearer to those receiving the letter, the author says, “You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

This event – the transfiguration of Jesus – revealed Jesus in all his glory and foreshadowed his death and resurrection, redemptive acts for all people. Yes, the days are hard as we await the return of Christ and fulfillment of Christ’s realm on earth. There was much weighing down the disciples as they walked with Jesus as he turned his face to Jerusalem to face the cross. And yet, Jesus takes a moment to pause and pray and sit in God’s glory. This is something I think we are asked to do as well, in this season of the church year, in this season of life, in this season of the chaos. For a brief moment, three of the disciples see Jesus in his radiant splendor, see him in all of his glory. It was an overwhelming moment. And Peter and James and John want to hold onto that moment. As the Rev. Cameron Trimble notes, “They want to build shelters around the moment, to keep it contained, to make the brightness permanent. Instead, the vision passes. They must walk back down the mountain and return to the long work of love, justice, and suffering.”³ That is what we do on this Jazz Sunday. Sit in the light and the radiant music, so that we are strengthened for the work ahead.

Yet they – and we - don’t walk down that mountain the same as when they walked up. They saw a lamp burning in dark places and this gave them courage and encouragement to face the days ahead. And there were dark days ahead that they would need to face. Days darker than they possibly could imagine. Days when they would have looked at the ugliness of humanity, cruelty and violence inflicted on one they loved, an empire trampling the dignity of the people, the authorities shattering hopes and inflicting hardship just because they could. Peter and James and John would not be able to avert their eyes from this pain and suffering,

³ Cameron Trimble. Learning Where to Look. *Piloting Faith*. February 11, 2026. Online at: <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/learning-where-to-look>

just as they were not able to look away from the glory of God shining through Jesus. God gave them a taste of a better vision so that they might be strengthened for the reality they could not escape, the reality that lay ahead.

This is tension we sit in as we get ready to face the Lenten season. We have climbed up through stories of Jesus birth and baptism, and his healing and liberating ministry. And now we begin descent down to Jerusalem. We walk the path to the cross and weep with the one is unjustly condemned by the authorities, tortured and killed so that we may know true freedom.

This is where we find ourselves on this Transfiguration Sunday. Sitting in our pain and suffering and struggling to understand the truth of the world in which we live. A world where authoritarianism has grown at the expense of individual liberty and freedom. A world where we struggle to find joy amidst the pain. **And** a world where we know the power of communal rituals to be a healing presence in our lives. In a few minutes we will partake of one those healing rituals as we come to be fed at the table of grace. The table where Jesus invites us to put aside our pretenses and come hungry for a taste of love. A taste of mercy. A taste of hope. A taste of the glory of God that comes in the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ. A taste that can heal so many wounds.

I saw a story in the news this week about the power of ritual to strengthen us. A group of dozens of Somali mothers in Minneapolis are quietly resisting the surge in federal immigration officers in the Twin Cities by brewing traditional tea. They hand out the steaming cups to people on the streets who monitor for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in subfreezing temperatures. Their ginger-flavored traditional tea is not just an efficient way to warm up in the cold Minnesota weather. It is also a way to connect with local residents. One of the women said, *"Our neighbors have provided invaluable support during the incidents with ICE.* They have supported us. They came to our rescue and offered us protection. In return, we offer them tea and sambusas." This group of Somali mothers has been passing out tea at memorial sites for ICE victims Renee Good and Alex Pretti. "As mothers, we felt deep sorrow for the mother who was murdered, as she left behind children, and that truly affected us. Then the boy who was a nurse was another tragedy. It broke our hearts to lose these precious people."⁴ A lamp shining in a dark place. That is what we hold on this Transfiguration Sunday – to hold the light of Christ's glory for maybe just a brief moment, so that we too can be the light of Christ's glory, in the darkness of the world. Our call is to be like these Somali women - a lamp shining in a dark place. May it be so. Amen.

⁴ <https://apnews.com/video/somali-mothers-brew-tea-to-strengthen-community-amid-minneapolis-immigration-crackdown-39617df358754fca9a226e5a51d98af6>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhoeBHIGVII>