

**Sunday, February 15, 2026**  
**Pastor Douglas Larson**

**Sermon on Matthew 17:1-9**  
**First Lutheran Church, Aitkin**

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

How close to Jesus do you want to be? There are some that don't want to be too close or get too close. But you are here because you want to be close to Jesus. I've heard of some Christians who believe they are so close to Jesus that He will arrange for a parking spot when they are late for an appointment. That may not be the closeness we are looking for.

Peter, James and John didn't have a choice about closeness when Jesus took them up a mountain. As they went up suddenly Jesus was transfigured before them. That's different than being transformed. Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes were whiter than white. WOW! This was more than they were expecting.

Then it got better, because they saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus. Moses was the person who talked with God and brought the Ten Commandments down from Mt. Sinai. He represented the Torah, the Law or the word of God. Elijah was the biggest of the prophets, representing those who were sent with a message from God. Moses was buried by God on a mountain and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Peter wanted to stay on this mountain and build a tent for each of the Big Three people in Judaism. It's good to be here!, he said.

Then a cloud moved in and the voice of God spoke to the disciples: "This is my son, my beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."

Maybe some of you here have had an experience like this with God, with Jesus. Saul had one when Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus. Martin Luther King, Jr had an experience like this, which he related in his sermon, "I have been to the mountain top and I have seen the other side." A German pastor about a hundred years ago, named Rudolf Otto had a similar experience which he put down in a book called "The Idea of the Holy."

How close to Jesus do you want to be? Maybe we want this type of experience. I know I have asked for something like this from time to time. In reality, these experiences probably won't happen to us. And maybe we don't really expect a

mountain top experience, but maybe we do want to be closer to Jesus. Maybe we think we aren't close enough to Jesus or that we should be closer. Maybe we feel or think something is missing.

David Brooks is a nationally known columnist, writing for the New York Times. He wrote a book back in 2013, "The Road to Character". He thought it was pretty good and yet—something wasn't quite right. Shortly after his book was published, his life went to pieces. He lost his marriage and found himself living in a small apartment, sensing his work, his reason for being and his relationships were out of synch. David Brooks was raised in a family in which one parent was Jewish and the other Christian and that caused him to have a foundation in God, in Jesus and religion.

Brooks said that as his life unraveled he felt himself journeying through a valley, like in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. The long and short of his journey resulted in Brooks realizing that while he had climbed to the top of a mountain in regard to job, family, income and had a happy feeling, that he knew he was missing "joy". Joy in the sense of a deep satisfaction with who he was, his place in the world and his community. David Brooks wrote a second book called "The Second Mountain" in which he spelled out his understanding that true meaning and joy comes from giving of himself.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountaintop, relish in the pazaaz of the moment. But the voice of God from the cloud said to Peter, James and John, "Listen to him. Listen to Jesus".

In the last month we have had two Gospel lessons taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. What have we heard from Jesus there: Blessed or honored are: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and you are salt and light to the world.

To listen to Jesus as God says, what happens when we honor, treasure, help these people and hold them up when they are down? What happens when we seek to be these people in our daily lives?

The Transfiguration of Jesus points to his coming again at the end of times, as we confess in the Apostle's Creed and to which Jesus teaches in his parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. There Jesus says that when he comes to judge the world and takes his place on the throne, he will divide people like a shepherd divides the sheep and goats on cold nights. Goats need to be

covered in the cold; sheep can stand the colder nights. Jesus said he will say to those on his right side, when I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger or alien, naked, in prison—you helped me. They will respond in surprise, saying, when did we see you? When you helped these people, you helped me, I was there. Jesus is telling them that they listened!

We are told to love God with all our heart, our mind, our soul and all our strength. That's a pretty big order. From the cloud God breaks it down for us, "listen to Him". Listen to what Jesus thinks is important and try to make that important to you.

Do you want to be closer to Jesus? Do you need to be closer? Maybe as you have been listening to Jesus and trying to value what He thinks is important in your life, you **Are** close to Jesus, close enough. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen