

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the light of the world and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

Here we are in the Sunday of Transfiguration, the final Sunday after Epiphany. On the first Sunday after Epiphany, we stand at the Jordan River. Matthew tells us that as Jesus rises from the waters of baptism, the heavens open. The Spirit descends like a dove and rests upon him. A voice speaks over the waters: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And today, on the last Sunday after Epiphany, we climb a mountain and hear that voice again. In the brightness of the Transfiguration, as Jesus’ face shines like the sun, the declaration returns: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased... Listen to him.” These holy bookends draw our gaze to Jesus — God made flesh and radiant with glory. In him we behold a God whose holiness fills heaven and whose love steps into water, into cloud, into human life. A God enthroned in majesty **and** walking beside us. A God wrapped in light **and** reaching out a hand.

Transfiguration Sunday is the transition from Epiphany to Lent. The dazzling cloud that overshadows them on this mountain will give way to darkness on another hill. The blazing glory of God is strong enough to walk into suffering and not be extinguished. For we know that the world is pretty dark right now. Our hearts break for the people of Tumbler Ridge and we ask, how long O Lord? There is so much tragedy all around us we are experiencing compassion fatigue. We are weary, so very weary! We are carrying heavy burdens and are looking for the rest that Jesus promises us. Transfiguration Sunday stands here, at this threshold, to prepare us. It reminds us that the light we follow into Lent is not fragile. The mountain of light turns us toward Jerusalem. The voice of affirmation prepares us

for the shadow of the cross. We stand today in brilliance — and on Wednesday we will kneel in ashes. This is not contradiction. It's invitation.

The reading from Exodus 24 draws us to another mountain. The Lord calls Moses: “Come up to me.” A cloud covers Sinai. The glory of the Lord settles upon it like devouring fire in the sight of the people. Moses waits for six days and on the seventh day God calls him again to enter the cloud where he remains for forty days and forty nights. Down below all the people of Israel see is what looks like a devouring fire. But Moses hears invitation. “Come up to me.” Transformation begins with invitation. God does not drag Moses upward. God calls him. And Moses responds. He ascends. He waits. He enters the cloud. The glory of God is not merely spectacle; it is relational. The tablets are given “for their instruction.” The radiance of God forms a covenant people.

Then we ascend the mountain in Matthew 17. Again, there is glory. Again, there is cloud. Again, there is a voice. Again, there is fear. Jesus is transfigured. His face shines like the sun. Moses and Elijah appear — they represent the Law and the Prophets, and they bear witness. The entire story of Israel converges in Jesus. Peter, overwhelmed, wants to build tents. He wants to contain the moment. But the cloud interrupts him.

“This is my Son, the Beloved... listen to him.” (Matt 17:5)

Not build for him. Listen. The disciples fall to the ground, overcome by fear — just as Israel trembled at Sinai. But here something new happens. Jesus comes and touches them. “Get up and do not be afraid.” (Matt 17:7) Holiness reaches down. The glory that once burned at a distance now kneels beside frightened

disciples. The fire of Sinai now has human hands. And when they lift their eyes, they see “no one except Jesus himself alone.”

The second letter of Peter reflects on this event. “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” It was seen. Heard. Experienced. “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.” (2 Peter 1:19) There is a movement from Sinai where glory is on the mountain, to the mount of transfiguration where glory is in Christ’s face and body, to glory rising in your heart. The transformation becomes participatory. What was once external fire becomes internal light.

When the morning star rises in the heart, it illuminates not only beauty, but shadow. When the veil is lifted, we see more clearly — and that clarity can be uncomfortable. The disciples fell in fear. Israel trembled. Holiness exposes. But exposure is **not** rejection. It is invitation. The voice says, “Beloved.” The Son says, “Do not be afraid.” And so Transfiguration Sunday stands at the doorway of Lent and says: You have seen the light. Now dare to enter it. Let it illuminate the dark places in your soul. The things you need to bring to God for healing and forgiveness. Confession is not groveling before an angry God. It is entering the cloud. It is stepping into the fire that refines but does not destroy. It is naming the places where fear governs us. Naming the resentments we protect. Naming the wounds we hide. Naming the behaviours that keep us from love.

Within the Anglican tradition, the Rite of Reconciliation or Confession offers a concrete way to enter the cloud. It has often been described this way: all may, none must, some should. It is invitation, not compulsion — echoing God’s call to Moses, “Come up to me.” In this sacramental moment, a penitent speaks honestly

before God in the presence of a priest. Naming sin aloud breaks isolation. Sharing brings clarity. The cloud that once felt frightening becomes a place of encounter. Then comes absolution — not vague reassurance, but a declared forgiveness grounded in Christ's saving work. The priest speaks Christ's promise: you are forgiven. It is a mountain moment in ordinary space. Holiness and mercy meet. Truth and tenderness embrace. Often there is counsel, sometimes a simple act of prayer or restitution and a mysterious healing and release. The Rite trusts what the Transfiguration reveals: the glory of God does not annihilate. It transforms. What feels like devouring fire becomes refining light. As Lent approaches, this sacramental gift stands before us as a pathway from fear to freedom — from trembling at the mountain to being touched and lifted by Christ himself.

As I've said before, the Spirit is not so much cleansing us from impurity as she is irrigating our wounds. Wounds inflicted on us by ourselves, our own sins, and wounds inflicted on us by others. Richard Rohr says that we are punished by our sins rather than punished for our sins. There is deep wisdom in that. Sin can be considered as anything which causes harm to others or ourselves. That's a big list and self-examination is never easy! This is partly due to the fact that we often don't have the language we need to name the things which cause harm. We run our lives on autopilot reacting to our environment and the people we encounter in it. We don't often take the time to examine our emotional or intellectual reactions. The Twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous has given us very effective tools for self-examination. It is the absolute centre of the program. The fourth step is the one where we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. There's a reason it's step four and not step one. There's groundwork that needs to be done

before you can even begin this difficult task. I'd like to read the first four steps to you now with some minor edits.

- 1. We admitted we were powerless over what causes us to harm others and ourselves - that our lives had become unmanageable.** If you are having trouble with this first step, let me remind you of what Paul said in his letter to the Romans: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." (Rom 7:19) As many teachers of the Twelve Steps have said, the first Step is probably the hardest, the most denied, and the most avoided. We so want to do the work ourselves, to be in control of the process. But as Richard Rhor says, if we try to change our ego with the help of our ego, we only have a better-disguised ego! As physicist Albert Einstein frequently said in a different way: No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused the problem in the first place. We must realize we are powerless before we can surrender.
- 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.** The statement is wise enough to use an active verb to describe this step: "We **came** to believe" The surrender of faith does not happen in one moment but is an extended journey, a trust walk, a gradual letting go, unlearning, and handing over. No one does it on the first or even second try. To finally surrender ourselves to healing, we have to have three spaces opened up within us—and all at the same time: our opinionated head, our closed-down heart, and our defensive and defended body. That is the work of spirituality—and it is work. It is finally the work of "a Power greater than ourselves," and it will lead to great luminosity and depth of seeing.

**3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.** Now I know that surrender is not appealing. But think of it this way, it is not giving up but giving over. Over to the care of God, not just God, but into God's care, God's steadfast unconditional love, infinite mercy, and abundant grace. In step three, we begin the process of opening the shutters and allowing God's light to enter. God's word is a source of light with which we can examine our behaviour. We begin to notice our patterns, our motives, our longings. We come to understand ourselves and our circumstances with deeper honesty and hope. The light does not overwhelm; it clarifies.

**4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.** I want to give a word of caution and grace here. Many of us have felt the judgement of others, a parent, a rigid culture, or a finger waving church and have internalized that judgement. We already beat ourselves up and now we are asked to do this searching and fearless moral inventory thing. But the purpose of this inventory is for the sake of truth and humility and generosity of spirit, not vengeance on the self or some kind of total victory over the self. The intention is not perfect moral victory, certainly not moral superiority, but luminosity of awareness and compassion for ourselves and others.

So, only **after** we realize that any self-improvement project isn't going to help and that we are powerless; **after** we come to believe that only God can restore us to sanity and make us whole; and **after** we have turned our will and our lives over to the care of God; only **then** do we turn to the task of the moral inventory. We have to trust that we are God's beloved children and that there is only love, acceptance, forgiveness, and cleansing of the wounds our sins have caused us,

**before** we can take that fearless look inside. That's what makes it fearless! There is no condemnation or judgement, only grace.

So let me give you some language to be able to name some of things you may need to be cleansed of. Do any of these behaviours sound familiar?

The need for control; holding ourselves and others to standards impossible to attain, then judging harshly when they are not met; dishonest (usually to make ourselves look better); inconsiderate; selfish; lack of self-discipline or control; being rigid and inflexible; sarcasm; anger; pride; envy; resentment; manipulate others to satisfy our emotional needs, or our need for power; seeking approval from others at the expense of our wellbeing or the wellbeing of others; getting stuck in misery and negative thinking; martyrdom, that is, the need to be seen as sacrificing yourself for others, whether that's your family, your friends, your work, or your church.

You can see how any of these behaviours will harm ourselves and others. They are almost always fuelled by fear. Fear of rejection, fear of not being good enough, fear that we won't be financially or physically secure. We develop behaviours to relieve these fears, and these behaviours wound deeply. They are deeply ingrained, and we are powerless to change them. But God isn't! If we repent of these behaviours, we will be forgiven, our wounds will be cleansed so they can heal, our burdens will be lifted, we will find rest.

And this brings us to **Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.** "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." (James 5:16) There is this wonderful line from the Gospel of Thomas where Jesus says "If you

bring forth that which is within you, it will save you. If you do not bring it forth, it will destroy you." (Quote 70) When human beings "admit" to one another "the exact nature of our wrongs," we invariably have a human and humanizing encounter that deeply enriches—and even changes lives—often forever! It is not an exercise to achieve moral purity, or regain God's love, but in fact a direct encounter with God's love. Only love effects true inner transformation, not duress, guilt, shunning, or social pressure. Love is not love unless it is totally free. Grace is not grace unless it is totally free.

So I invite you beloved community to use this period of Lent to use the Rite of Reconciliation and the 5 steps to lay your burdens down and receive healing, restoration and transformation.

Oh, my child, lay your burden down, lay them at my feet.  
God who watches over you will never slumber nor sleep.

Amen.