Key Passage: Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to [Jesus]. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. (Exodus 34:29c)

Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name....O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. (Psalm 99:6,8)

Sometimes when I am standing at the entrance to the church, greeting worshipers as they leave a service, visitors begin to gather for a peek inside. I like to watch as they begin to take in the grandeur of this building. Often their faces express amazement at the beauty before them. I daresay that this feeling of awe is shared by many of you regular worshipers in this place. Truly we are blessed with a treasure that speaks of God’s magnificence.

As I prepare to end my time with you as Associate Rector, many people are asking me about high points of my memories here. And lots of them have to do with this beautiful place—candlelight spread over the packed pews in the glow of a carol service; a church overflowing in a rally of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization; a profusion of flowers as we baptize new believers at the Easter Vigil; stained glass windows blazing in the afternoon sun; the splendor of our almost-restored organ leading us in singing as we process into God’s house for worship. Inspiring moments when God seems especially close to us in mysterious majesty and glory.

Perhaps those are tiny glimpses of the experiences we read about in our lessons today. Today, the last Sunday after the Epiphany, is the feast of the Transfiguration. Three disciples accompany Jesus up a mountain, where they experience a vision of a transfigured Jesus, who appears in glory with Moses and Elijah. We also read about Moses who ascends Mount Sinai where he encounters God and receives the Ten Commandments, returning with his face shining with light of God’s presence. In each case, the glory and power of God are manifested in cloud and radiant light. In these encounters, we humans feel
divine power overwhelming us as God is revealed. The radiance of that light is reflected in us, on our faces and in our hearts.

God’s glory is revealed in Jesus and in Moses and Elijah, the traditional symbols of Hebrew law and prophets. Their appearance confirms our understanding of Jesus as Messiah, God’s promised deliverer. This epiphany is further reinforced in the voice which echoes the one heard at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

The context of this affirmation is important. Just prior to the transfiguration, Jesus has been telling his disciples that he will suffer and die. He challenges them to take up their own crosses and follow him. This message is echoed as Jesus converses with Moses and Elijah concerning his “departure,” or “exodus,” the classic expression of God’s power to deliver us through suffering and oppression to new life. The transfiguration, then, is of suffering into liberation, the assurance of God’s constant desire to bring us into fullness of life. Jesus is God’s most perfect expression of the power of love to overcome suffering and death and to bring new life. It is the gift extended to us by God’s graceful action in Jesus.

The disciples are understandably dumbfounded by this encounter. Peter, ever quick to speak up on many occasions—wants to preserve the moment with a proposal to erect dwellings on the mountain. Before we lose patience with Peter, we need to understand that our own desire to capture and preserve holy encounters is reflected in our building of places of worship. An experience of God’s magnificence inspires us to reflect that glory as we praise and worship the God of power and might.

As magnificent as these worship places are, we cannot stay in them forever. We have moments of experiencing God’s holiness, and then it is time to go back down the mountain, continuing the lives to which God calls us. Radiant with the experience of God’s love, we draw on God’s power to help us understand the suffering and oppression of our world, looking for signs of God’s redemption brought to life in loving hearts and deeds. We pray for the continuing sense of God’s transformation so that we may find our place in God’s kingdom, the reign of love which Jesus ushers in.

The rhythm of worship and service, of transfiguring light and transforming love, sets the pattern of our life as God’s children. Together we are formed by God’s grace, able to follow Jesus into whatever dark places we may be called to enter, following the light that can be trusted to bring us into a safe place. We do this together, as God’s light is reflected in our faces, signaling to others that God is being revealed in our lives, lives that have significant high points and many more times on the valleys and plains of the everyday.
So when people ask me about the highpoints of my time here, I often speak of the glorious experiences I mentioned at the outset. And I also think increasingly of the smaller moments--conversations over coffee, prayers at a bedside, confessions of white supremacy, the inviting library at McCormack Middle School, sharing Bible studies, and seeing your eyes as we share Communion. The radiance of God’s transfiguring love shines over all that we do together.

Through moments of ecstasy and hours of slow work we are formed as God’s disciples. We do this together, in community, as we see and call out in each other the radiance of God’s love reflected in our lives. That is what it means to be church, the gathering of God’s people. That is what it means to worship a holy God, as we see in today’s Psalm. “The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples,” Ps 99:2). We are humbled in the presence of God, even as we raise our voices to praise the source of our light and life.

The Psalmist is clear that our life together is shaped through God’s constant presence with us, God’s leading and guiding, so that we are able to make our way. The psalmist speaks of the leaders of the faithful—“Moses and Aaron among his priests, Samuel also among those who called on God’s name,” (Ps 99:6). As these leaders cried to God, they received God’s response in “pillar of cloud.” But the Psalmist says more. In their responses to a God of justice, faithful people often miss the mark. “O Lord our God,” says the psalm, “you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, a purifier of their wrongdoings,” (Ps 99:8).

God’s forgiveness--the power of divine love extended to all people—is the true glory of God showered upon us, washing us clean from our mistakes and fitting us for life together. We recognize God’s greatness as we acknowledge our own failings. We experience God’s forgiveness as God empowers us to forgive ourselves and each other. The transfiguring glory of God brings us to our knees and then lifts us up to praise the holiness of the one who loves us immeasurably.

Life is mostly not mountain-top experiences. Life is full of day-to-day, ordinary demands and satisfactions. And life is almost always cut through with disappointments and sorrows. Whether it is illness, or failure, or loss, or racism, or homophobia, or other challenges, at some point our hearts will be broken. The consistent thread through all these times is the mysterious and sustaining love of God. The God whose glory transfigures Jesus is the God whose forgiveness flows like blood from the cross and whose promise brings a continuing sense of Christ in our lives.

God’s mysterious presence has the power to transform all our experiences—the mountaintop ones and the lowest points. God’s love displayed in Jesus is a dazzling light that exposes our own failures and fuses us in new wholeness like
a piece of molten glass in a LaFarge window. We see each other’s faces shining with God’s radiance, and we know God’s promises to be utterly reliable. This is the journey that we travel by the mercy and grace of God.

You have helped to form me on this journey as you have welcomed me into your lives. Together we have looked for signs of God’s redeeming love, we have rejoiced in the signs of the light, we have lamented the dark places, and we have learned how to share that love. Through these disciplines we have grown closer to the image of God that is embedded in each of us. It is a mutual process of forgiveness and praise as the sculptor of our souls shapes us for lives of glory to God. It is terrifying and joyful work, made possible only through God’s forgiveness and mercy.

I am grateful for our time together, for the ways you have supported me and all the clergy and other leaders at Trinity Church. And I know you will continue in mutual ministry with the care and love you have showered on me, in reflection of the blessings you have received at God’s hands. Bound together by God’s grace, renewed by God’s forgiveness, and challenged to live boldly as God’s children, you reflect the radiance of God’s love. May that light continue to shine brightly in this place.

“Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.”