

MESSAGE OUTLINE

Thin Places: Seeing the Year Ahead with God

Matthew 17:1-9 (NIV)

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."

⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

NOTES:

A Glimpse of Glory and a Familiar Tradition

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

³ *Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*

"Why Moses and Elijah? The question will be partially answered by 17:9-13. Both are foundational figures in shaping God's people. Perhaps they represent the Law and Prophets, which Jesus interprets and accomplishes...Jesus is located in the tradition of God's previous dealings with God's people." Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*

The God Who Comes Near

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."

When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

"This is the way that God comes into the world: not simply the brilliant cloud of mystery, not only a voice thundering from heaven, but also a human hand laid upon a shoulder and the words, 'do not be afraid. God comes to us quietly, gently, that we may draw near and not be afraid. God's glory is majestic and so far beyond our capacity to receive it that we can take just as much of God's glory as a human hand can hold.'" —Patrick J. Wilson

Thin Places: At the Threshold of the Cross

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

"What the story of Jesus on the mountain demonstrates, for those with eyes to see or ears to hear, is that, just as Jesus seems to be the place where God's world and ours meet, where God's time and ours meet, so he is also the place where, so to speak, God's matter – God's new creation – intersects with ours.

As with everything else in the gospel narrative, the moment is extraordinary, but soon over. It forms part of a new set of signposts, Jesus shaped signposts, indicating what is to come: a whole new creation, starting with Jesus himself as the seed that is sown in the earth and then rises to become the beginning of that new world." *Simply Jesus*, N.T. Wright

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

January 18, 2026

As needed, refer to the Order of Worship and Resources at solanabeach.church for sermon video, message outline, resources and small group questions print version.

CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

Before beginning your time in the passage this week, share with one another about how the week has been for you.

CONNECT WITH GOD

Remembering Sacred Moments Meditation:

Breathe deeply, turning inward, and noticing God with you. In your mind, scroll through your life as if thumbing through the pages of a photo album. Notice moments that feel sacred or expansive to you, where God's presence was heightened for you. This could include moments of deep peace, love, connection, clarity or vitality.

Focus on one of these moments and allow yourself to re-enter and remember it. Where were you? Who were you with? What were the circumstances of your life at the time? What were you Hearing? Smelling? Tasting? Feeling on your skin? Simply rest in and soak in the sweet-spot of this moment, allowing God to be with you as you remember.

As you prepare to conclude, sense any invitation for one concrete, future act to help you remember and sustain your connection with the grace of this moment and God with you.

- Adapted from *Remembering Sacred Moments Meditation* from The Compassion Practice

CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- **Together and Alone:** Read Matthew 17:1-9 once together and then once alone. Reflect/journal on one or both of the following prompts:
 - What do you think the disciples expected Jesus' mission to look like—and how does this moment disrupt those expectations?
 - Where might God be working in your life (or in the world) in ways that don't fit your expectations?
- **Together** as a whole group: Share your own reflections from the prompts. Also, consider wrestling with any remaining questions or curiosities around the topic of *thin places*.

CONNECT WITH SCRIPTURE

If needed, read the passage again. Then select the best questions or customize the questions for your group.

- Review the sermon outline.
- What do you notice about the transfiguration scene?
- What is the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus?
- Discuss the scene where the disciples fell on their face afraid. What was Jesus' response?
- Discuss the response of Peter? Why does he want to stay and build shelters?
- Where do you see a "thin place" on this high mountain?
- Is there anything unexpected about this passage?
- How does the transfiguration reveal something new about who Jesus is?
- What does Jesus' response (and the command to go back down the mountain) teach us about thin places?
- Why are the disciples instructed not to tell anyone yet (verse 9)?
- Where might God be inviting you to notice *thin places* in your own life right now?

ENGAGE AND EXPLORE

Together: explore this quote, in connection with the passage this week and the topic of *thin places*.

"The mountain-top explains the hill-top – and vice versa. Perhaps we only really understand either of them when we see it side by side with the other. Learn to see the glory in the cross; learn to see the cross in the glory; and you will have begun to bring together the laughter and the tears of the God who hides in the cloud, the God who is to be known in the strange person of Jesus himself. This story is, of course, about being surprised by the power, love and beauty of God. But the point of it is that we should learn to recognize that same power, love and beauty within Jesus, and to listen for it in his voice – not least when he tells us to take up the cross and follow him." N.T. Wright, Matthew for Everyone

PRAYER

Invite one another to sit in silence. Reflect on the enfolding year before you, whatever that looks like for each of you. In stillness, hear the words of Jesus: "Don't be afraid." Continue in silence for a while. Then, ask someone to close the time with the prayer below.

"O God of light, reveal Your glory to my eyes and heart. Transform my vision so that I might see Your presence in every day, and carry Your radiance into the world. May this glimpse of heaven shape the way I love and serve." (Prayer by Keith Riley)