



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A February 15, 2026

RCL: Exodus 24:12-18; **2 Peter 1:16-21**; Psalm 2; Matthew 17:1-9

Opening Prayer |

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Context |

In modern usage, a “last will and testament” is a legal document that provides instructions concerning a person’s final wishes following their death. It concerns one’s legacy and what that person wants to leave behind.

2 Peter is a similar type of writing. This epistle is an example of the ancient Jewish literary genre of testament. 2 Peter is a testament in letter form. A testament, in this sense, is also concerned with one’s legacy and final wishes. This genre of writing was a leader’s way of saying farewell to their followers when death loomed (2 Pet 1:14). It usually includes reminders of their teaching, ethical advice, warnings, and, perhaps, predictions for the future.

Testaments were typically not written by the leader in question, but by someone else writing in their name, perhaps one of their followers. 2 Peter is no exception. Most New Testament scholars, as far back as the third century, do not think the apostle Peter actually wrote 2 Peter. Several factors lead to this conclusion but the likely date of when this epistle was written is key.

Peter 3:16 mentions “all” of Paul’s letters being misunderstood in the same way as “other scriptures.” This implies not only that Paul’s writings are complete, but that they are regarded as scripture. This did not occur until the second century, though Peter and Paul both died in the mid-60s. The epistle also borrows heavily from Jude. This puts 2 Peter as probably the last New Testament text to be written, likely in the early to mid-second century or possibly late first century.

Someone writing in Peter's name fits the testament genre. The writer frequently employs the first-person plural, indicating a likely role as representative of an apostolic group. The writer may have been a part of a group that was closely linked to Peter and his teachings. The later date of this epistle also contributes to the problem it addresses: the need for faithful endurance in Christian living while awaiting Christ's return. The earliest generations of Christians, including Peter, were dying, but Jesus had yet to come back. This led to "false teachers" (2:1) saying that Jesus would not return, and therefore moral, faithful living did not really matter.

Theological Reflection |

Today's reading comes from early in the writer's argument against these false teachers. The writer rejects the notion that Christ's return is a "cleverly devised [myth]" (v. 16) and states two ways that the community can be assured of this.

First, Peter, James, and John were "eyewitnesses of [Christ's] majesty" (v. 16). The writer recounts Peter's witnessing of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain and hearing God the Father say, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). This event is told in today's Gospel reading, Matthew 17:1-9 (cf. Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36).

"Majesty," "honor and glory," and "Majestic Glory" as well as the proclamation from "God the Father" (vv. 16-17) all emphasize Jesus' status as God's Messiah who will save humanity and ultimately rule the "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet 3:13). "Glory" is often used in the New Testament in association with Christ's Second Coming (e.g. Mark 8:38, 13:26, Luke 21:27), and these descriptions are also linked with the Transfiguration account (Matt 16:27 precedes today's Gospel reading). The Transfiguration marks an inbreaking of Christ's full glory in the physical world now, and the writer views this as a preview of the glory of Christ at his Second Coming. The argument for Jesus' return is rooted in the lived experience of Peter and the other apostles. This was not something they "cleverly devised," but something they witnessed firsthand (v. 16). The false teachers the writer warns about deny the reality of Christ's Second Coming, but Peter's eyewitness of the Transfiguration establishes the trustworthiness of Jesus' return.

But it is not only experience that establishes that trust. The "prophetic message" of scripture also points to Jesus and his return. The writer says that "no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (v. 21).

Later, 2 Peter 3:2 urges readers to remember not just the words of the "holy prophets," but also "the commandments of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles." This, combined with the mention of Paul's writing in 3:16, implies that the writings of the apostles themselves are seen as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The writer's defense of Christ's Second Coming is based on the apostles' historical witness of the Transfiguration and the divine inspiration of scripture. The scriptures weren't written only "by human will" or imagination (v. 21). Just as Peter and the others witnessed the glory of the Transfiguration and told about it, so too is God's word communicated through human participation in writing scripture.

Experience and scripture establish the trustworthiness of Peter's teachings regarding Christ and his return. Because the apostles experienced Jesus, and because scripture tells about him, Christians can have faith that Christ will return. And we can strive to live faithful, virtuous lives now.

Throughout the season of Epiphany, the gospel readings have shown us the rippling revelation of Jesus' identity, culminating in Christ being transfigured in glory today. Scriptures such as these are one way we know Christ. But, like Peter, we can also know Christ through experience: the Sacraments, prayer, worship, relationships with others, time spent in creation.

This "knowledge of [Christ] who called us by his own glory and excellence" (2 Pet 1:3) allows us to "become participants of the divine nature" (1:4). Through Christ, we have been "given...everything needed for life and godliness" (1:3). When we are faced with false teaching, doubt, or discouragement, we, like the writer of 2 Peter, can turn to the trustworthiness of experience and scripture to bolster our faithful endurance, as we wait and "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

Discussion Questions |

- Where do you see evidence of the inbreaking of Christ's glory in the world?
- How has scripture acted as "a lamp shining in a dark place" (v. 19) for you?
- When you are faced with doubts about faith, from where do you draw reassurance? What experiences or scriptures sustain your faithful endurance?

Faith in Practice |

What personal experiences or favorite scriptures are important to your faith and help you to trust in Jesus? If you were writing a testament, what sources would you draw from to establish the legacy of your faith? Take time to reflect on this. Write it down so that you can turn to it as a source of inspiration for faithful endurance. Consider sharing it with a friend.

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