Illusion. Turn on the TV - go to the movies - your eyes are fooled by illusion. What looks like a room in a house is a set, walls that only appear to be walls. Ships traveling through space on a Star Trek, cars scattering pedestrians in a chase scene, villains plunging to a death in a fall from a skyscraper - all illusions. Tour Universal Studios, buy a book on magic, watch some TV special on how it is done and all the cables and wires come into view. But on the screen you see illusion.

Maybe art is simply copying life. I put on robes to stand before you. White. Illusion. Maybe you think me different, holier, better because I dress thus.

And you? Do you practice illusion here also? Does your vocabulary change in this place? Do you present a best self here, a better self than you are here? I know I try to. I know how I try to keep you from seeing all the wires and cables that hold the illusion I present together. I don’t want you to see me before the shower is taken, the fresh clothes put on, the facade of goodness and love and being wise covering all the clutter and disorder within. And when you see me behind the illusion I am afraid you won’t have any interest in me any more. Because I am just common and ordinary and vain and often foolish - just like some of you.

One day - on the seventh day Matthew tells us - Jesus took Peter and James and John backstage. They went up a mountain where God would show them what was behind the facade of this common, poor, everyday sort of man named Jesus.

On this high mountain by themselves suddenly Jesus was transfigured before them - his appearances changed - that is what transfigured means. His face shone like the sun - his clothing became dazzling white. Two heavenly beings, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, talked with him just like you might talk with me after worship. I get the impression that Jesus and Moses and Elijah were not strangers.
A bright cloud overshadowed them, and out of the brightness God spoke, “This is my beloved Son, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.

The disciples fell to the ground overcome by fear. Jesus touched them, and said to them, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up they saw no one except Jesus himself, alone.

For just that moment, the curtain was parted and the disciples saw backstage. And they saw that it was the commonness, the ordinariness, the *simplicities* of this man Jesus that hid a greater reality. “This is my beloved Son, the Almighty had said.

Listen to him.

How strange that God should do in Jesus the exact opposite of what we do here. I dress myself in fine things that what your eyes see might influence your ears to believe what I speak. But God hides the glory of Jesus in a poor man’s clothes. We build and decorate our places of worship so that strangers may come and be drawn into this gathering. But Jesus whose palace is the whole of heaven became a wanderer dressed in words. We would like to gather here the best and the brightest and the most influential of this world but Jesus took some common laborers, Peter and James and John up on that mountain with him.

Most shocking of all is that Jesus surrounded this moment on the mountain top with talk of his suffering. Of the cross. Of his dying. In a short time the world would see a fool dying. The world would see a man who had entrusted himself to God and lived for others dying abandoned - even by James and John and Peter. Forsaken by God. A failure, shamed by his nakedness, shamed by the mocking, shamed when sunshine refused to to look on his humiliation. But God would be seeing the obedience of the beloved Son taking upon himself, your sin, mine.

Sometimes people think that they have made the great discovery about religion when they see behind the illusions of this place. They think that when they have perceived that I am just a common man, weak, fallen, that they have seen reality. They think that when they see your shame, bickering, bitterness, the very
failings that afflict the unredeemed that they have really understood. But Jesus whose glory was hidden by
every day clothes and human flesh is not ashamed of you. Your weakness, your sin, your fears do not need
to be covered over for him. He calls you by name, he names you his own, he promises when you fall down
in fear his word to you will be, “Get up and do not be afraid.” Throughout life he will bring you to your
feet again and again until that last time when you fall down into death, and his voice and his touch will raise
you to into his glory. His life will be your life, his home your home, his Father your Father forevermore.