

"Too Bright"  
March 3, 2019

Exodus 34:29-35

Pastor Cathy L Hamblin  
Hayward United Methodist Church

Call to Worship      Psalm 99

The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.

**Let us thank your great and awesome name. He is holy!**

Strong king who loves justice, you are the one who established what is fair.

**Magnify the LORD, our God! He is holy!**

Moses and Aaron were among his priests, LORD our God, you answered them.

**Magnify the LORD our God! Bow low at his holy mountain because the LORD our God is holy!**

Prayer of Invocation

Radiant God, your glory shone upon Moses when he saw you, face to face; your glory shone on the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus; your Holy Spirit fell upon Christ at his baptism like a dove from heaven.

**On this Transfiguration Sunday we remember how that same glory shone in and upon him on the mountaintop. May the light that is in Jesus enlighten and enliven us. Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others. 'Breakthrough' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.**

The Word      Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God. **When Aaron and all the Israelites saw the skin of Moses' face shining brightly, they were afraid to come near him.**

But Moses called them closer. **So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke with them.**

After that, all the Israelites came near as well, and Moses commanded them everything that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. **When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.**

Whenever Moses went into the LORD's presence to speak with him, Moses would take the veil off until he came out again. **When Moses came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was shining brightly.**

So Moses would put the veil on his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the LORD.

Living the Word

Wednesday 2/20 Email: "Cathy, My wife, Rhona, is in extreme critical condition at a hospital in Birmingham. Please pray for strength and healing. Right now she is not strong enough to withstand the surgery she needs. The surgery is equally as critical." Thank you, **Ken** Baginski

Thursday 2/21 11:24 am Email: "She is going into surgery soon. She is extremely sick and we don't know what's happened inside her until she is reopened. Two things, I believe I am about to witness a living miracle. Secondly, the power of prayers being said took everything out of what I thought was in my hands and totally humbled me." Respectfully, **Ken**

Same Day 3:47pm "My home pastor and I after getting the results of Rhona's surgery." (picture)Ken wrote "Notice the light in the picture." "Two men who just witnessed a miracle!"

God's light shines where it will. Often in places and timing that we least expect it.

I want us to step back a bit in Moses story by going to scripture, previous to today's scripture that we have shared. Reading Exodus 24:12-18. *"The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. I'll give you the stone tablets with the instructions and the commandments that I've written in order to teach them.' So Moses and his assistant Joshua got up, and Moses went up God's mountain. Moses had said to the elders, 'Wait for us here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur will be here with you. Whoever has a legal dispute may go to them.'"*

*Then Moses went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The LORD's glorious presence settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from the cloud. To the Israelites, the LORD's glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain. Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights."*

Moses had brought the Israelites out of slavery, through the Red Sea, away from the Pharaoh King, through the wilderness wandering for forty years, to God's holy mountain. Moses left the people and went up the mountain. Moses was in God's presence for 40 days. When he came back down the mountain with the stone tablets, engraved with God's law, he did not know that his face was glowing as he returned to the people gathered. Moses could not see his own face, but others could see it. Their reaction was fear and perhaps awe.

For any of us, preparing to be a faithful bearer of God's word involves time alone with God. Moses received instructions and prepared himself to bring God's word to the people at Mount Sinai. Those people were sometimes referred to as stiff-necked, unruly and stubborn...as an example if you read about their journey out of slavery and through the desert, you would agree.

The glow on Moses' face came from standing in the presence of the Divine. Even today, others may notice the glow before it is seen by the one who wears it. This can happen to those who live in God's presence, well-versed by life within the community and the traditions, all grounded in prayer and hope. In other words, the glow comes from seeing Christ in others and being Christ to others, and this happens within community.

A church worship service can be a place where God's presence-in-community is experienced. It can, at times, during the worship, inspire an emotional response. A sense of God's presence may be reflected in the joy or glow on people's faces. God's presence may be felt in the terms of shared smiles of warm greetings, shared passionate prayer concerns, stirring hymns and songs, even some hand clapping!

At a relatively quiet point in a particular worship service, a young boy, perhaps three years old, and part of the church family was sitting between his parents. He was a bit restless. So he turned around and saw all of the faces looking forward. At first he just stared, then suddenly a big broad glowing smile appeared. His

smile called out smiles on the faces of others. Nothing was said, no words spoken, just a big broad grin spread across his face.

He could not see his own face, but the people around him could. It was as if the all who saw him in that moment, with him. brought about the presence of God among them. That morning the boys smile, and glow, brought a new way to worship in God's joy together. The smile came first; the glow came to the boys face when he saw the smile returned, as the congregation expressed their experience of God's presence in that moment.

Moses encountered the presence of God on the mountain, and one Sunday morning a young boy encountered the presence or Spirit of God through the community that surrounded him. In that way the congregation witnessed their faith to the boy just by sharing back a smile. Who knew that evangelism could be so easy...

That is a story of a small glow. Has anyone ever come across someone with a 'zeal' to share the presence of God with anyone around them? Hearing the gospel story for the first time, I mean really hearing it, can cause a glow. It can also give an experienced Christian 'heart-burn' as they consider how long and well they have already known what this zealous Newby is trying to tell them. We need to find joy in the glow of others as they discover what great things God has for them, even if we have gone before them in that knowledge for ourselves.

Maybe it is a yearning or even a bit of jealousy as we remember how long it has been since we were told by someone that we had a glow about us... I invite you to think about how long it has been since you were close enough to God's presence through prayer, through meditating on the scriptures, through others to feel a glow in your heart or on your face.

Today is the last Sunday before Lent begins. In the Christian year we often celebrate this day as Transfiguration Sunday. The story of the transformation of Jesus is one that has much to say, about the presence of God, in Jesus, the glory of Christ.

The scripture in Luke, chapter 9, says that Jesus took three of his disciples to the mountaintop to pray. "*As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes flashed white like lightning.*" The glory of Jesus shines through this story, illuminating and highlighting Christ's Divine nature.

As Jesus was transformed he was joined by Moses and Elijah, 'also clothed in heavenly splendor.' (Bible's words, not mine). Wait, Moses died thousands of years before Jesus and the tablets of the law, the commandments had been lost somewhere in time. Elijah, a prophet of the Old Testament, had also been gone for centuries. Interesting! Peter, James and John didn't get it, that Moses, Elijah and their conversation with Christ we pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's laws and prophecies.

When things began to click for the three disciples, they became flustered by the whole event and began offering hospitality to all present. God then covered the whole scene with a cloud and in a reprimanding voice says to the three disciples: "*This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!*"

There must be many times when God gets frustrated with each of us and wants to shout “you are missing the point.” The transfiguration of Jesus offers a glimpse of what is possible, not only for Jesus, but for all humanity.

Heidi Neumark uses these verses as she tells a powerful story of transfiguration. In her memoir Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx she details the transformation of the church she served for almost twenty years. Aptly names Transfiguration Lutheran Church the community was struggling, barely surviving, when she arrived.

Standing amid poverty and the myriad problems that can stand that can accompany such a demon – crime, drug abuse, lack of education and opportunity, lack of hope- Transfiguration Lutheran Church mostly kept its doors shut tight to the world around it.

When the disciples of this Bronx church finally unlocked the doors of their private shelter and stepped out into the neighborhood, they did meet the distress of the community convulsed and mauled by poverty...But they also discovered transfiguration as a congregation with others.

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus loses its power if it does not include that moment when Jesus and the disciples come down from the mountain. The transfigured Jesus is changed, not in fundamental nature, but in the way he is seen; he acts in and for the world accordingly. Seeing Jesus differently means seeing oneself and others differently too.

The congregation at Transfiguration Lutheran Church understood that living high up in the rarefied air isn't the point of transfiguration... It was never meant to be a private experience of spirituality removed from the public square. It was instead a glowing vision to carry us down, a glimpse of unimagined possibility at ground level.

One of the reasons I knew I was called to pastoral ministry, began when I was asked, one Sunday, as a lay person in this church to serve Holy Communion. When the children, including my own two sons, came to receive, came forward as a part of the church family. There was a glow on their faces as they got to be with us in those moments. They responded as if they knew they were loved Children of God in the joyful presence of their Creator God.

Today we are standing, or sitting on Holy Ground. Soon we will be sharing in the body of Christ acknowledging the new covenant that Jesus lived for, and died for and now lives with us, for. When there are children who join us to share in this meal. They come eagerly to the table to receive Christ. Today, how will you receive Christ? Then take a look around you as the meal is served and see if you see any shining faces.

PRAY: Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place. I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace. I can hear the brush of Angel's wings; I see glory on each face. Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place.