

LAST SUNDAY IN EPIPHANY

Year C

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Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face, ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off until he came out, and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining, and Moses would put the veil on his face again until he went in to speak with him.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

We may remember that this is the second time Moses has come to the people with stone tablets containing the covenant of God. The first time is told in chapter 32, and it was kind of a disaster. In the first reception, Moses returns to find that Aaron has allowed the people to erect a golden calf. He breaks the stones, dismantles their idolatry, and leads them to atone for their sins in chapter 33. It is after this atonement and reconciliation that we now see Moses being invited by God to receive the covenant again on behalf of the people. Following this devastating failure of the people and her leaders, we see Moses' face aglow with the glory of God. Moses' face, once burning hot with rage, is transformed into the glowing glory of a God who will not give up on the people and is determined to enter the covenant of the Ten Commandments and bring about righteous relationships in their community.

Discussion Questions

What in your life are you praying God will transform from rage to the glowing glory of righteous relationships?

What in our world are you praying will be transformed from idolatry to atonement by the glorious presence of a God who doesn't give up on us?

Psalm 99

- ¹ The Lord is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.
- ² The Lord is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.
- ³ Let them confess his Name, which is great and
awesome; *
he is the Holy One.
- ⁴ "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in
Jacob."
- ⁵ Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.
- ⁶ Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his
Name, *
they called upon the Lord, and he answered
them.
- ⁷ He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that
he gave them.
- ⁸ O Lord our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.
- ⁹ Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the Lord our God is the Holy One.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

The Lord is king. The magnitude of God's reign and holiness in this psalm is an encouragement to Christians in America today. We live in a culture that encourages us to believe that we alone are the rulers of our destinies, the captains of our own ships. And in our hotly contested national life, we are encouraged to believe that celebrities, politicians, and billionaires are kings by virtue of their wealth and prestige. The psalmist reminds us that it is the Lord alone who is great and worthy of our worship. The psalmist also reminds us what sort of ruler we find in our heavenly king. The Lord, who is sovereign over the earth and heaven, is not like the rulers of this earth. The Lord loves and executes justice and establishes equity.

Discussion Questions

How might God be inviting you to respond to the idea that the Lord is a king who loves and executes justice and establishes equity?

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

¹²Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness, ¹³not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside. ¹⁵Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, ¹⁶but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

4 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We have renounced the shameful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

The veil is a fraught modern-day symbol. For some, the image conjures the terrifying world of Margaret Atwood's book, *The Handmaid's Tale*. For others, it is an image of the holy virtues of humility and modesty. And for too many around the globe, veils, or hijab, are politically weaponized against our Muslim siblings. In today's reading, Paul re-interprets Moses' veil story in a surprising way. In reading the Exodus text, it seems that Moses veils his face so that the glory of God doesn't frighten the Israelites and with the intention that they are not hindered from hearing the word of God. Paul uses this image to suggest that the opposite of that intention happened.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul is reconciling with the church in Corinth after a prior, grief-causing visit (2:1), and he is defending his authority over and against the teaching of people he calls "the super-apostles" (11:5, 13; 12:11). It is against this backdrop that he is speaking of the unveiled truth of Jesus. This disagreement and conflict in Corinth calls to mind questions that we ask in contemporary society all the time—whose mind is veiled? Who really knows the truth; who gets to decide on our collective truth? It is in moments of deep disagreement over central religious and theological truths that Christians are called to embody the freedom and transformation that we know in Christ. The unveiling of Christ to us is not meant to be a weapon for us to lord over others; it is a gift that Paul says has given us a "ministry of reconciliation" (5:18).

Discussion Questions

In our diverse and multi-faith world, what does it mean to hold on to the truth of Christ in the spirit of reconciliation that Paul is recommending in 2 Corinthians?

How might we pray for and embody the transforming glory of the Holy Spirit amid deep disagreement?

Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” not realizing what he was saying. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

[³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was being brought forward, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]

Commentary from Jordan Wesley

The transfiguration of Christ is monumental in the gospel story. Up to this point, Luke has given ample evidence that Jesus is the Messiah coming from the long prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. From the stories of Mary and Elizabeth, who mirror the stories of Hannah and Sarah, to the encounter with Simeon and Anna in the temple and the genealogy of Jesus, the transfiguration is a dramatic moment to further emphasize the point. Jesus is the Chosen One of God who must go to the cross in Jerusalem. But we see here that the disciples, terrified by the holy cloud on the mountain, kept silent – so silent that when they descended from this mountaintop experience, they were unable to cast out a demon who was terrorizing a child. This story turns from terrified and ineffective disciples to an astounded crowd marveling at the greatness of God. As disciples of Jesus today, we can understand this journey of discipleship. Going to the mountaintop with Christ can be holy, amazing, surprising, and terrifying. Following Jesus can challenge our assumptions about the world and teach us uncomfortable truths. Sometimes we miss the mark, and the gospel story is found outside of us or maybe even despite us. Even though the story points us toward the failure of the disciples, we remember that the story begins and is held by the glory of God being revealed. Jesus, dazzling in the holiness of God’s presence, heals a young boy.

Discussion Questions

How might we stay close to Jesus’ glory, even and especially when we miss the mark as disciples?

What are you learning about Jesus that is unsettling you, challenging you, or amazing you these days? How might you be invited to deeper discipleship through this?