



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Last Sunday after Epiphany (C)
March 3, 2019

[RCL] Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

Exodus 34:29-35

This passage comes after the original tablets of the Ten Commandments were broken and the people had crafted the golden calf when Moses had not returned from Mount Sinai. Moses asks for God to reveal himself, and God's nature is revealed as faithful, merciful, gracious, and loving. In the face of the people breaking the first commandment, God responds in love and with mercy, renewing the covenant that is represented in what we know as the Ten Commandments.

The divine light of God is physically reflected on the face of Moses, but it causes fear. Fear is our natural instinct in the face of something new, even if what is new is from God. Much like the time of the Exodus, our world is changing very quickly, and it is natural to be fearful. Here, Moses soothes the fear through the use of the veil—to meet them where they are—and through relationships. Moses' recognition of their fear allowed him to walk with his community towards the promised land and into deeper relationship with God.

- What relationships lead you toward a deeper relationship with God and how might you cultivate them further?
- Describe someone in whom you see God reflected. Who are they and how do you see God in them?
- What is something that you are truly fearful of and how might God help you to not be afraid?

Psalm 99

The majesty and greatness of God are awe-inspiring and overwhelming, and this psalm reminds us of the many ways in which the Hebrew people encountered God. Though the use of the word “king” to describe God can make us uncomfortable, the psalmist makes it clear that we worship and seek God who is great and awesome, not because of God's power or wrathful judgment, but because God is a lover of justice, equity, and righteousness. Like Moses, Aaron, and Samuel before us, we bow down and worship God not because we are frightened, but because by seeking God we seek goodness, righteousness, and love.

We also seek God who hears us and is faithful. The stories of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel remind us of God's love for us and how God calls us into covenant in order to bring forth justice and redemption for the entirety of creation.

- When we worship God, are we focused on justice and redemption? How can we turn our hearts towards justice and redemption in worship?
- Have you called upon God and been answered like Samuel? What happened and how did you respond?
- Do you have something to ask forgiveness from God for?

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

It can be tempting to read this passage at face value and assume that Paul is arguing Christianity is simply better than Judaism, recognizing that Paul is often trying to make Christianity approachable for gentiles. However, careful reading of this text shows that Paul uses the story of Moses to lead the Corinthians to experience the Lord in a similar way as Moses; turning to the Lord, to Christ, with our hearts and souls is different than only following the law. Just as Moses experienced God in such a dramatic manner as to be transformed, so can we reflect God's glory and then bear witness to the transformation of the world.

It is helpful to look back at the context that Paul is focused on with the church in Corinth. The church is in turmoil and the members have caused pain for Paul and each other. Yet Paul has already told them that his hope for them is unshaken, and it is through the glory of God that they can be transformed. If the church in Corinth—and we, by extension—can truly open themselves to the risen Christ, metaphorically being unveiled before him, they can be transformed in a way that cannot be veiled or concealed. The same glory that transformed Paul from persecutor of the church to apostle now seeks to help them experience the radiance and splendor of the risen Christ and to live into the freedom that is available through him. There is hope for the church in Corinth and there is hope for our broken world through seeking to experience the risen Christ by shedding our own veils.

- What keeps us from fully experiencing Christ in a visceral and transformative way?
- Conflict is an inevitable component of being in community. How can we seek out God in those moments as Paul does with the church in Corinth?

Luke 9:28-36 (37-43a)

The season of Epiphany focuses our attention on Jesus as the Christ, the beloved Son of God, the Messiah. Like the scene of Jesus' baptism, we hear God's voice not only identifying Jesus as God's Son, but also imploring the disciples to listen to him. The presence of Moses and Elijah connect Jesus with the law and the prophets; Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophetic voices of the Hebrew Bible. Like we were at Jesus' baptism, we are presented with a dramatic scene that compels us to explore and experience this intersection of the divine and our humanity.

Jesus' face is radiant, like Moses, signaling to us that this is the very presence of God. And yet, unlike Moses, Jesus' clothing is dazzling like the angelic figures encountered at Jesus' tomb after his resurrection. This is more than being in the presence of God. This is God embodied in Jesus, fully present with the disciples.

Luke wants to leave us with no doubt that God has revealed himself through Jesus. The liberating work of Moses in the Exodus is magnified; we are liberated in our life in Christ. The powerful words and motifs of justice, mercy, and righteousness that we experience through the prophets are exemplified by Elijah, and will be made manifest and embodied in the work of Jesus (we are reminded of the reading from the scroll of Isaiah earlier in the Epiphany season as well). As we continue to engage this intersection of the divine and humanity, we do so through the lenses of justice, mercy, and righteousness that Jesus embodies as the Christ and as fully human. This exemplifies that as we journey with Christ and in Christ, these should be the pillars of our lives as well.

- Where do you see justice and righteousness in the world around you? Where is it lacking?
- What is your favorite story of a prophet from the Hebrew Bible? What do you love about it? Is there a similar story from the life of Jesus?
- Who would you identify as a modern-day prophet and why?

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