

Transfiguration Sunday

February 7, 2016

“Worthy and Glorified”

Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair

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Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹Moses 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. ³⁰When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³²Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴but 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, ³⁵the 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.

2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2

¹²Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 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, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it 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.

⁴Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; 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.

Luke 9:28-43

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶When 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.

³⁷On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹Suddenly 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. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴²While he was coming, 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.

⁴³And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

1.

Please mark your hymnal at page 366.

The glory of God was a problem for the people of God. Remember the story of Moses going up a high mountain to meet with God? Thunder and lightning and smoke announced the presence of God. And God cut two stone tablets for Moses, what we call the ten commandments.

And when Moses came down from that meeting with God, when he emerged from the smoke at the bottom of the mountain the people did not cheer his return, or cheer the gift of the ten commandments he carried in his arms, no, they were afraid and told him to keep his distance. Because his face was shining. He had come close to God and God's glory had made Moses' face shine in a way that terrified the people.

So Moses covered his face with a veil when he spoke to the people, and he removed the veil whenever he spoke with God.

The glory of God was a problem for the three disciples who went up a mountain one day with Jesus. On that mountaintop the groggy disciples saw Jesus at a distance talking with Moses and Elijah, and suddenly Jesus' face began to shine, and his clothes were transformed into dazzling white. The stunned disciples said silly things like, "Let's build a shrine up here on the mountain to remember this wonderful thing that has happened to Jesus." The transfiguration of Jesus belonged in a museum, they thought. It should be like a picture that hangs on a wall, roped off from grimy hands that might spoil it. It should be seen, they thought, but from a safe distance.

God's glory is a problem in these two different narratives. God's people want to keep God's glory hidden behind a veil or safely in a museum. What nonsense, Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians. When they keep God's glory at a distance they are resisting their own transformation.

And then Paul says the most amazing thing. "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." In Jesus Christ, Paul says, we are being glorified.

2.

This week we start the season of Lent. And Lent is a time we may use to examine our own lives, to be truthful with ourselves about how we are living. It's a time to be honest about our mortality, our limitations, our sinfulness. We might discover that our pride gets in the way, and Lent becomes an opportunity to whittle down our ego a little bit, to give God more control of our lives. I'm in favor of that.

But pride may not be our problem. It might be just the opposite. Just as the people wanted Moses' glory to stay at a distance, and just as the disciples wanted to enshrine Jesus' glory where it could be safely visited, our problem may not be pride. It might be our sense of unworthiness-- that we don't measure up before God. Our opinion of ourselves may be too low.

Think about it. When Paul says you are being glorified in Jesus Christ, does your spine tingle with doubt? Do you hear a parental voice cautioning you to not get a big head? Who me? Glorified?

This self-deprecation we carry with us is revealed when we can't imagine we are saints, or God's chosen people, or God's holy people. Others might fit those descriptions, but not me...

I hear there's a game on TV this evening that many of us will be watching. How many people have we heard say, "Well, I don't really watch because I love football, I just love to watch the commercials." And those commercials, those 10 million dollar a minute commercials are going to tell you over and over how your life could be better, how your looks could be improved, how

your status could be higher, if you only followed their advice. You're not good enough the way you are, they say.

These commercials will entertain us tonight, even as they point out our neediness. But for some people, maybe some of us, we hear the message every day that we don't measure up. That's called verbal abuse- when words are used to belittle, to dismiss, to marginalize. Children learn to doubt their value. Adults are demeaned at work by their supervisors. Too many of us come to believe what we have heard. It may not be pride that limits us, but our learned self-denigration, instead.

3.

God's glory shines in Moses. Jesus shines on the mountaintop, revealing God's glory among the disciples.¹ It may seem that glory is God's business, that glory is something to be seen not touched. Until we read Paul's words to the Corinthians. God's glory is meant to transform, he says. God's glory is the Holy Spirit's gift that changes God's people, little by little, to be like Jesus.

It says in the Psalms, "Yet you have made "humans" a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." (Ps 8)

And in a prayer to God, Jesus says in John's gospel, "The glory that you have given me I have given them... so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

The glory of Christ is not a picture hanging in a museum, but a beautiful power at work in his life and death and resurrection. Jesus is glorified for a purpose. After God's voice came out of the cloud, Jesus led Peter, James, and John down the mountain. And at the bottom there was quite a commotion going on. The nine disciples who had not gone up the mountain had spent their day trying, unsuccessfully, in the valley, to heal a boy who was suffering from seizures. The son who had been glorified at the top of the mountain then healed the son who was suffering at the bottom of the mountain. Christ lived out his glory in the way he lived for the world.

"Let your let shine," he once said. Don't hide it, take it out and let it shine.

4.

I've told you about the Korean pastor I worked with in Forest Hills, Queens. He asked his congregation to create a mission statement. So they worked in small groups and reported their ideas. Some groups wanted to become more spiritual. Some wanted to heal the brokenness in their community. As they reported their ideas their new mission statement began to emerge. It was very simple: "We want to be more like Jesus."

That might sound audacious, bold. Until we accept that God declares us worthy, worthy enough to bring us close so we will shine and serve as Jesus did.

¹ Paul Scott Wilson, editor. *Abingdon Theological Companion to the Lectionary: Preaching Year C*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2012, p64.

It's important that our children are affirmed with love and grace every time they gather in Sunday School.

It's important that our youth are affirmed every time they share highs and lows at youth group meetings.

We want to teach our worth in Session meetings every time we share what has happened in our lives since the last meeting. It isn't just a nice thing to do, it declares our value to each other and our value to God.

We uphold each other's worth when we use our words to build each other up, to notice and nurture each other's gifts, when we say "good job", "thank you", "I needed that."

My uncle was a pastor and I was fortunate to work with him for a number of years. He had a couple of favorite sayings, and one was, "God don't make no junk." No. In Jesus Christ, God comes close to you and gives you glory and leads you into the valleys to let it shine.

Let's say it together (hymn 366, stanza 4):

Finish, then, thy new creation;

Pure and spotless let us be.

Let us see thy great salvation

Perfectly restored in thee;

Changed from glory into glory,

Till in heaven we take our place,

Till we cast our crowns before thee,

Lost in wonder, love, and praise.