

Last Epiphany

February 7, 2016

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai; his skin glowed from seeing God's glory.

2 Cor 3:12 – 4:2

Through Christ we see the glory of God with unveiled faces.

Luke 9:28-43a

Jesus' transfiguration

Transfigured in Glory

Today's Scriptures deal with what has happened over the millennia with the revealing of God's glory to us. And by looking at that progression, we can also see what God's purpose is.

We begin in Exodus 33:18ff; "Moses said (to God), 'Now show me your glory.' And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' Then the Lord said there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.'"

Moses came down from Mount Sinai after seeing God's presence – remember; not actually seeing God, but a burning bush, later a cloud, and later the shadow of God moving away – visible signs of the presence of God. Moses' face glowed from the experience. He carried the glory of the presence of God down from the mountain with him. The people were so afraid at the sight of God's glory reflecting from his face, that he put on a veil to hide it. God's glory was made known to Moses, and he reflected God's glory out, for all to see.

Jesus experienced the glory of God on another mountain top. And the experience transfigured him. But it wasn't just Jesus' face that glowed. Matthew gives us more detail than Luke does; that Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. Moses' face glowed from being in the presence of God; Jesus' whole body glowed, as though the glory of God was filling him up from the inside out, and radiating from every pore of his skin. At the Transfiguration, Jesus was not reflecting God's glory, but revealing the glory of his divine nature to this very select group; Peter, James and John. They carried that glory of the presence of God down from the mountain with them. It served them and empowered them in their own ministries later.

Paul teaches that through our faith in Jesus Christ, he has permanently removed any veil that might separate us from the glory of God; “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of God as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

By our learning about Christ’s life, we understand more and more how wonderful God is, and what He is really like. As our knowledge deepens, the Holy Spirit helps us to change. The more closely we follow Jesus, the more we will be like him.

Our deeper knowledge of God (now that we know Jesus) leads to an understanding that the glory of God is not only the power that created our world and us; the glory of God transforms us, because God the Spirit lives in us, changing us from the inside out, and wanting to reveal this glory to everyone.

Thomas Merton was a Catholic priest, and a Trappist monk. It is said that he used to travel from the monastery to the city of Louisville, Kentucky when he was a young monk. At first everything of the world seemed repulsive to him. But in prayer he gradually learned to see more deeply. Later, when he went to town, he was astounded at how beautiful everything was. He stood on a street corner one day, and it was as though the entire city glimmered with the grace of God. He asked himself, “How do you tell people that they are walking around shining like the sun!” Have you seen that ‘presence’ in someone?

A personal transformation in my own faith life is that I sometimes can see that light of God’s glory shining from people who let themselves be used by God. I saw that in the faces of people here, when I arrived in 2002. I see it today. This wasn’t something I could always see; it has developed. (4 yr old preschooler-gave thanks for heaven; parish members with giving heart-SMUM computers, XMX utility pymt.)

Some people have told me that they can physically see that aura around some people. That is a little scary, but I believe it. Have you seen that power to transform at work in someone you know? Have you felt that power at work in you? Have other people shared with you how they have seen God working through you?

Scripture calls us to set aside any veil that might hide what we hold in us, so that everyone can clearly see and feel what it means to live in God’s presence. And we are called to stay alert to notice God’s glory at work in unexpected places. Amen.