

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 27, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Exodus 34:29-35

After crossing the Red Sea in Chapter 14, Moses leads the Israelites to Mt. Sinai to worship the LORD where he encountered the burning bush. This encounter begins in Chapter 19 and concludes with the passage this morning. After receiving the Law from the LORD, Moses brings the word to the Israelites who accept the Law in a blood covenant in Chapter 24. While Moses is receiving the Law in stone and instructions for the Tabernacle, the people break the covenant with the idol of the "Golden Calf". The consequence is the death of three thousand people and the LORD telling Moses that Moses can be the new Abraham without the Israelites. In response, Moses pleads with LORD on the people's behalf and asks for God's presence which passes him in the cleft of the rock (33:19-23). The LORD then stood with Moses (34:5) and wrote a new tablet of the Law. It is this closeness to the LORD both in the rock and at the writing of the new Law that shines forth on Moses' faith. It is the guilt of their own failure that causes the Israelites to ask Moses to veil his face because his righteousness reveals their sinfulness.

Exodus 34:35 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.

When have you seen someone glow (with love, happiness, pregnancy)?

Has anyone ever told you that your emotions are all over your face?

Have you ever seen God in the face of another?

Can people tell you walk with Jesus by looking at you?

What would it be like to be so close to God that others want you to cover your face?

Commentary on Luke 9:28-36

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), there are two distinct ministries of Jesus. The first ministry is "repent, believer, the kingdom of God is at hand". This kingdom preaching of healing begins with his baptism and reaches its climax at the transfiguration. After the transfiguration, Jesus turns his attention to Jerusalem and the cost of faithfully living in the kingdom. The first ministry is the focus of the season of Epiphany and the second ministry is the focus of Lent. This reading from Luke marks the transition in the Christian year from Epiphany to Lent which explains the jump from Chapter 6 to Chapter 9. This passage from Luke differs from Matthew and Mark in two interesting ways: prayer and the wakefulness of Peter, James, and John. Luke specifically mentions that the transfiguration occurs during prayer and that even though they were very tired, the disciples were awake to see the transfiguration. This is in contrast to Jesus' last night when again he was in prayer and asked the same disciples to pray with him but they fell asleep. Even in their wakefulness, however, Peter still did not understand what the transfiguration meant.

Luke 9:29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

What happens to you when you pray?

Is it one sided like placing an order with a waiter?

Or do you feel God's presence bathing you in peace or prompting you to action?

When was the last time you truly rested in God's presence?

Could others tell that you had been praying?

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Earlier in Chapter 3, Paul returns to a theme common in Paul's theology: law versus spirit. The law is written on stone and brings death while the spirit writes upon the heart and brings life. This reference to the three thousand who died after the "golden calf" also occurs in the Book of Acts on the day of Pentecost when three thousand were "saved" on hearing Peter's sermon (Acts 2:41). Continuing in this theme, Paul refers to the veil worn by Moses. The veil becomes a symbol of the condemnation of the law without the hope of grace. For Paul, the law serves the purpose of killing our pride and selfishness so that we might be resurrected by the Holy Spirit and given new life. While at times it is difficult to follow Paul's logic due to his own rhetorical style, Paul does not want to throw out the law but rather want to clarify the role of the law. For those who are not saved, the law convicts them of their sins and drives them to the cross. But for those who are saved, they are to live for the love of Christ and not in fear of the law. Through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit removes the veil and reveals a life changing grace. The light of Spirit is then allowed to shine forth in the life of the Body.

2 Corinthians 4:2 We 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.

Are you completely honest with yourself and others?

How much effort does it take to hide something?

In the end is it worth it?

What if there was nothing for anyone to gossip about?

If your life were an open book, would it be empty or worth reading?

What if your pages were filled with the faith, hope, and love of God?

Reflection on Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9:28-36, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Sermon "The Light of Prayer"

My wife loved being pregnant. She felt great and had this Mona Lisa smile. It didn't hurt that she avoided morning sickness, had a husband that would run to the store at 3am, and was confined to bed rest the last two months so she was waited on hand and foot. Looking back on the pictures of those times, she did have a glow about her. The new life growing inside of her seemed to put off this radiance of hope and light. While her body was being transformed physically, her spirit was transfigured with an energy deep within that made her soul smile. I had only seen her like that one other time. When she would come back from a religious retreat where lives were changed and she felt particularly close to God, she would glow. Rather than putting a veil on her, however, like Peter I wished I could build a shelter to capture that radiance especially knowing how quickly life would steal it away.

Spending time with God should renew our spirit and make it shine. Those who regularly spend this time resting in God seem to have a peace and gentleness about them matched only by an inner strength and sense of purpose. After spending time with God on the mountain top, Moses glowed with the presence of God. Like a cup filled to overflowing, Moses poured forth the Spirit onto the people. Once his cup was empty, he would place a veil over his face until it was time for him to commune with God once again. The veil of the world often covers us with the worries and concerns of life begin to clutter our to do list. Honey does, business meetings, and daily chores all turn our attention from God and place a veil over our spirit. We sometimes get so caught up in the busyness of the world that we forget the glow and peace of spending time with God. While some seek solace in the cool bottle of beer, how much more relaxing is it to feel God's love and assurance pour over the soul in prayer. That is true prayer. Prayer is not like ordering a meal from a divine waiter but it is like resting in the hot tub of God's grace. It takes time and God will remind you when is time to get out but, while you are there, your soul is restored with the light of God's glory and grace.

Peter, James, and John saw this when they went with Jesus on the mountain to pray. The veil of

Jesus' incarnated flesh was lifted revealing the wondrous light of Jesus' divinity. Jesus wasn't transformed for he was always fully divine and fully human. Instead, Jesus' internal divinity was transfigured to the outside like a garment of dazzling white so that his disciples could see the truth of his soul. This is what happens when we pray. We bare the truth of our soul before God and ourselves. Sometimes that truth is not as healthy or clean as we pretend it to be. The veil helps us avoid looking at those habits and wounds that we hide from the world. Like the old story of Dorian Gray's Picture or modern day Facebook, we wear masks of health and wholeness so the ugliness of our sin remains hidden. In prayer, however, God removes our veil like a bandage over a wound and tenderly treats the injury. At times prayer can sting as deep rooted infections are sterilized by grace but in the end the wound is cleaner and healthier. Just as new skin on a wound is brighter, so our soul shine with the radiance of God's forgiveness and redemption.

For Paul, Christians are called to live a life with our veils removed. Christ has healed our deepest wounds of sin. Our bandages need to be removed so that the new creation can be seen by the world. There is no longer shame but rather the brilliance of God's grace through the Spirit in our lives. Free from the bandages of guilt and fear, Christians should glow with the love of God in the world. Our lives should be transfigured so that we wear the Holy Spirit as a brilliant white garment of new life we have found in Christ. This is all possible because in Christ we can boldly approach the throne of grace in prayer. That sweet hour of prayer that pardons and cleanses us from within. We need this prayer as Lent calls us once again to honestly examine our life and our soul. It is only through God's strength in prayer that we can walk the journey to the cross where our deepest healing occurs. Before beginning this journey, let us take a moment and bath in glory of Jesus' light and love which Peter, James, John, and Moses all experienced. Then, with veils removed, let us follow boldly our Savior as he turns his face to Jerusalem