

Exodus 34:29-35

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36

Shining

Have you noticed how a little child smiling or laughing can just bring out the joy in everyone. It is like their light shines and that little light radiates joy that is contagious. I think of times when I have been in a restaurant and a child nearby catches my attention and I theirs. I get a little grin and then I smile and it becomes this back and forth of exchanging joy. I have seen it happen in church where a little one happens to be looking back at people in the pew behind them and people light up either trying to elicit a smile or giggle or returning a smile. Before you know it a whole host of people are no longer focused on worship but rather the little person who in that moment of exchange is lighting up the space. I have seen it at hockey games and concerts alike.

You may have met people who have that effect. It may be that when they enter a room there is a shift, you feel their presence. There is something about them that just makes you feel joy, or love, peace, or something. You may not even be able to identify what it is, you just know there is something about that person. I have also met those of who it is not at first obvious how their light shines, but through conversation or even just observing how they treat others you get the sense that there is something uniquely beautiful about how this one walks in the world.

I don't often have three separate scriptures read on any given Sunday, but on this Sunday, which is known in Christian traditions as Transfiguration Sunday, these three scriptures all speak about how someone appeared to shine. The first story speaks about Moses, the larger-than-life prophet and guide to the people of Israel who spent intimate time with God on Mount Sinai. When Moses came down from that mountain top experience with God his face was shining. He didn't realize it, but everyone else could see it. And for a few reasons others asked him to veil his face. You see coming that close to God's glory changes a person. It is transforming. God's glory is amazing, compelling, and frightening. When God's glory is encountered it changes those who come in contact with it. It can be frightening because people don't like change, even though it is constantly happening around us, we get comfortable with familiar habits and circumstances and we can insulate ourselves from change and transformation. Moses' face was a reminder of the glory of God that has power to transform who we are.

In the second letter to the Corinthians, once again Paul talks about the ancient story of Moses as handed down through the ages through the Jewish tradition. He puts his own spin on it, but essentially Paul is saying that the veil protects people from seeing God's

glory. We prefer to harden our minds rather than consider what God is up to in and around us. But when we live with Christ at the center of our being then the veil is lifted and once again the glorious shining of God's light radiates in and through us.

Finally, we come to the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. Here Luke tells the story where "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."

Did you catch all of that...another mountain top experience. Here too, not only is Jesus' face changed but all of Jesus is dazzling white. God's glory was not contained. And with him, two giant personalities in Jewish tradition are seen, both Moses who had led the people of Israel out of captivity and had experienced God's glory and so his face shone and also Elijah who is also associated with big changes in the lives of the people of Israel.

Still, where Moses' face shone, all of Jesus was a dazzling white. Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus was both fully human and fully divine and so it should not surprise us that all of God's glory shone in and through Jesus. Yet again, this was more than others could take in. Peter wanted to hold it all in place, make dwellings. Where the people had Moses wear a veil, Peter would put up buildings to contain God's glory. But God will not be harnessed. The moment passes, the crew come down from the mountain top, and the experience is not again shared until after Jesus death and resurrection, but you can be sure, just from the fact it is shared in the gospel account that it was never forgotten.

We do not forget our mountain top experiences. They may not happen on a literal mountain, but most everyone gets to have a mountain top experience. A moment of revelation of something wonderful and glorious, even if it feels a little dangerous. In fact, one may wonder if you can have a mountain top experience without it having some aspect of fear.

To only do what you have always done, to only see the world through a particular lens, does not lend itself to mountain top experiences. It is only when one puts themselves in a position of vulnerability, whether it is exploring a new place in the world, or taking the chance to speak to someone you have never spoken to before, it is then that one opens themselves to an experience that has the potential to change how you engage with the world.

It takes courage to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, and being vulnerable is not comfortable, it has its own element of danger and may make us fearful. Yet without opening ourselves to something new nothing can change, just like the Israelites, or Peter, we will want to hide or contain things to protect us from what we cannot understand or don't want to deal with. But the power that we feel, or maybe the better way to say this is, the empowerment that we experience when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and engage with something or someone new can be transforming.

Now think about this in terms of God. God is glorious! But God is also dangerous. We cannot contain God. We try, but really we are fooling ourselves. But what happens when we allow God to work in and through us, through our church and in community can be powerful beyond our imagining. Yet, we just keep trying to contain God in our wonderful sanctuary rather than letting God burst out of here. Now, God is not just here, but in our minds we limit God and God's power. We like the safety of our traditions and our way of doing church and our way of walking in the world. God may challenge you and us in our way, but we may choose to veil God or build a dwelling place for God, hence our church building, situating God in certain ways and places in our lives.

But again, God cannot be contained and as soon as we open ourselves up to that thought and let God loose through the power of the Holy Spirit, well, who knows what can happen here, in us, and in the world. To be sure it will be scary, maybe even dangerous. But it will be amazing. God will shine in and through us.

How do we make this happen. Well, it starts with relationship. It starts with taking time for God in one's daily life through prayer, scripture reading, and conversations. Getting intimate with God. It means trusting God enough to use you and transform you into God's likeness, as image bearers of God, with us becoming more Christlike.

We never hit perfection, but we take all of our experiences, both the mountain top experiences and the valley experiences shape us. We love mountain tops, yet valleys are also beautiful places. Valleys are where the work happens. It is in valleys that forests and fields can most fully yield fruitfulness. It is in the valleys of life, the everydayness, that we tend to grow more deeply in relationship with God and with others. Mountain tops take our breath away. It gives us a view that we could not otherwise have, but valleys breath life into us. It is often in the valleys of life where we become most fully who we are called to be.

What is most amazing is that in and through it all, you may find yourself shinning, not in a way that makes you popular, or important, but in a way that people wonder what is going on with you. It will be in a way that draws people to you, they will want to know the peace, joy, hope, love, and grace that seems to radiate or even glow from you.

It is also the way our church can and maybe even should be. A shinning, glowing presence in the midst of struggle and challenge. I believe that people should feel something when they are in this building and when they are encountering us. It should be beautiful, encouraging, maybe even transforming, not because of who we are, but because God is present and shining in and through us. May it be that we shine because God's glory is present with us.

We may not be transfigured as Moses and Jesus were, we are just ordinary people, but as Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, may we shine like stars in the world. The world could use some light right now and God is calling us to shine.