

Reflection March 2nd 2025

Exodus 34: 29-35

Luke 9: 28-36

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Title: What's behind the veil?

Prayer: Loving Creator, we are yours. Help us remember that, and use us to foster peace, please. Amen.

You know how there was that clip of world leaders and politicians and reporters and raised voices in the oval office all over the news a couple of days ago?

Well, I couldn't watch the clip. Couldn't watch it because I was nervous it would make me too sad, nervous it would shrink my hope and grow my fatalism. But I knew I had to eventually.

Yesterday I watched the C-Span coverage – the full 49 minutes. I watched facial expressions and body language, listened to the words, the volume, the interjections. Paid attention to the questions being asked, who was answering and how often.

Watching it so closely helped me see the bigger picture, the global picture. Helped me understand the global community a little more, that initiatives toward peace are the responsibility of everyone and affect everyone. And, I more readily understand now that “the responsibility of everyone” includes me too. You and me. Even if we think there isn't anything we could possibly do that could change one thing ... there is. Even wrestling with it moves the needle a little.

Now, I don't believe that pulpits are a place for politics. We get politics all week long. How often do we get some focused time to dig into scripture, sit with it together and find out what the Holy might be telling us today? We come to church to find out what this “Way” of Jesus' was ... is. What is this world that is right here right now and yet so different from the world we're living in? And, how do we live there while still living here? That's what the pulpit is for.

Having said that, I am feeling like peace is precarious right now. I'm feeling like our world leaders need a lot of prayer – all of them. I'm feeling like we're growing far too numb and starting to believe in inevitability more so than possibility.

And, I imagine I'm not alone in this. I imagine the exchange between the presidents of Ukraine and the US and all it represents holds a place in many of our hearts this morning. So, it seems appropriate to name that and find some aspiration or hope or comfort in our scripture today.

It's transfiguration Sunday. We are to talk about that out-of-the-ordinary moment when Jesus dazzles with brightness, Moses and Elijah show up and no one really knows how to explain what's going on, and then at the very end this voice says "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!"

In the lectionary, this story is accompanied by the shining face of Moses in Exodus. So, sure, let's explore this story, this passage, this out-of-the-ordinary moment in time; and let's see if it resonates in this moment in time. Let's see if there is anything this story reveals for us, in our climate, right now.

Today is the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany, Transfiguration Sunday. It is the Sunday before Lent and Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. What lies ahead of us between now and Easter is a confrontation between the non-violent justice of the Kingdom of God and the violent injustice of the Roman Empire. (*David Ewart words*)

Two very different approaches to leadership. One that only moves forward when all creation can move forward compared to one that leaves many behind in favour of the few.

In the book of Exodus Moses goes up Mt Sinai a lot – once even for 40 days and 40 nights. He has a lot of time with God on that mountain in that thin, sacred space where the created world and the transcendence of God meet.

In today's passage we learn that the skin of Moses' face was shining.

Moses had already received the 10 commandments from God on that mountain. But he'd taken too long, I guess. By the time he got down the mountain the people had made a golden calf to worship. In his anger, Moses broke the first set of tablets.

Eventually he was invited up the mountain again and God gave him the commandments a second time.

Some talk about how God's holiness was absorbed by Moses. He had been changed by his encounters with God. So much so that the Israelites were scared of him. With encouragement they listened to him, but Moses wore a veil so as not to detract from God's holy instruction.

It is good to be changed by God. The God we believe in is a just and loving God. And so if we are changed by this God we become just and loving people.

When the veil is pulled away, what is it that we see? Will we see the gracious character of God who is willing to renew the covenantal relationship with us over and over again; or will we be so afraid or skeptical or cynical about a glowing face that we won't notice God's presence at all?

In some ways the veil was lifted on Friday when we watched some raw footage of human nature. What did we see? What will we let transform us?

- Will it be the barbs and yelling?
- the power and patience of inner strength?
- Or something else?

On this transfiguration Sunday we reflect on how God's light shines – reveals itself – through the actions and lives of leaders and ordinary people of faith, to make God's transforming presence known.

Where did you see God's LIGHT on Friday?

Follow that.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all have similar variations on the Transfiguration of Jesus. Although we read the passages every year, two things stayed with me this week: the desire for permanence and the voice.

Peter wants to make dwellings for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. I got to thinking about Maga (Make American Great Again), and when people say "when I was little there

were 1000 kids in Sunday school,” and folks who feel like their lives after graduation never really matched those beautiful glory days of high school.

There is a desire to stay in the memory of something. If Peter can make these dwellings he can hang onto this incredible moment forever. He can go back to that spot as often as he likes and say “look, here is where it happened.”

Over time he will forget all the other ordinary or not so great things that happened at the same time and only remember this split-second feeling he had when Jesus was dazzling and Moses and Elijah showed up clear as day.

But staying there robs us of the chance to mature or evolve. That moment has become stagnant and can no longer reveal more to us over time.

Not only does our life continue to move, but so does the whole world. If we are unhappy with the state of the world or our community or our own lives today then our work is to decide how to change it now, not wish for a time when things ‘seemed’ better, ‘seemed’ simpler.

As soon as Peter suggests making dwellings a cloud descends and overshadows everything. The moment is gone.

And they have all been changed.

Their job now is to keep going, to allow themselves to be changed by this experience and then go and change their day, their community, the world.

We can’t go back.

But we’re so tempted to because it’s what we know. Working together, sometimes with strangers, for a future as yet unknown is terrifying because it involves trust and vulnerability and a certain relinquishing of control.

The second part of this passage that stayed with me was God’s voice at the end “This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!” In Mark, God says “my Beloved.”

Sound familiar? It’s what God says when Jesus is baptized by John and the Dove appears above their heads.

My child, my Beloved.

Listen to him.

I spent some time reading through all the things that Jesus taught because I thought, 'oh, 'listen to him' must mean I have to go back through all the gospels and figure out all the directions Jesus gave' – that's what 'listen to him' means.

But, then I realized 'listen to him' is more about the reason why we listen. In all that Jesus was and did and said, Jesus lets us know that we are also beloved children of God, that we are loved by God. That we are called to participate in Jesus' mandate to share God's love and blessing with all the world.

For some of us hearing that we are loved by God may not be revelatory because we grew up with folks who loved us and we knew what it felt like to be loved. It offered us a generosity of spirit, a foundational feel to our lives, a knowing that we could get support or comfort when we needed it.

For some who did not grow up with love, or who grew up with love that came at a price, it must be hard to imagine that there is a loving God who already loves you, who will always love you, who craves to offer you a foundation of love that will sustain you, a love so deep that it changes your perspective so much you begin to look at the world with love for the world.

From that standpoint accepting God's love might be near impossible.

To live in this kind of identity – a beloved child of God – is to transcend the challenges and suffering, even the joyous activities and opportunities of this life. Like Moses we may absorb some of the holiness of God and be changed forever.

I know it sounds so airy fairy, simple even. Just like last week ... really? All we need is love?

Yeah. If we know – deeply – in our heart of hearts – in our waking and our sleeping – that God loves us, always, no matter what, forever ... then YES it will change the world. How can it not? And, if we don't think God's love has that kind of power then what kind of God do we actually believe in?

Believing in the power of this kind of love is an act of change.

It made Moses' face shine. It made Jesus dazzle.

What will it do to us?

The book of Numbers offers us this blessing: May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." (*Numbers 6: 24-26*)

Amen.