

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

February 10, 2013

Exodus 34:29-35

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

Have you ever noticed this occurrence at the end of a snowstorm? It has been snowing hard for quite a while, but the snow is starting to let up. It isn't real intense and the sky above you starts to lighten. You start looking around for breaks in the overcast, though when you look up you don't notice any breaks in the clouds, but you do happen to notice something else. You look up and there behind the steadily breaking clouds you are able to see the round ball of the sun shining.

You can see the sun and it looks like a huge and gigantic white ball behind the clouds, but it hits you that at this very moment you are able to do something which you usually can't do. You are able to look directly at the sun, take in its entire shape and not be blinded when you do it. Do you ever find yourself doing this at all? It happened to me yesterday. It hadn't been snowing, but I managed to see the sun and its shape for a little bit, was blinded by it another part and finally it was hidden again.

The Israelites have something similar happen to them today in our Old Testament reading. They were encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai. This mountain was the place the Lord had called Moses to be his servant who would lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. The Lord had made Moses this promise, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

God fulfilled and completed his promise he had made to Moses by bringing the people to the mountain. Here at Mt. Sinai God would reveal his glory to the Israelites and show Moses was the leader he had chosen. "The Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.' Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said."

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.'" What would this look like? "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder."

The Lord's coming absolutely terrified the people. "When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear." The Lord's presence was like staring into the sun without any cloud cover. It was blinding, overwhelming and terrifying. They needed something to blunt the full force of God's brilliance. "They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'"

The people's solution was a good and God pleasing one. The people recognized they needed someone to be a mediator to talk to God for them. God had selected Moses for this purpose and by his design he led the Israelites to the same conclusion. This brings us to our lesson today. Moses was busy serving as the mediator for the Israelites. He had been on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights receiving instructions from the Lord and now he was going to report to the people what the Lord told him.

"When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the

Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” Moses didn’t realize it, but while he was speaking to the Lord some of the glory of the Lord had so to speak rubbed off on him and Moses’ face literally had the glory of the Lord radiating from it.

This glory terrified the people. Why? The glory of the Lord, whether it was in the form of the Lord himself descending on Mt. Sinai or radiating from Moses’ face, reminded the Israelites of their sin and their sin made them acutely and intensely aware of how unworthy to stand in the presence of God’s holiness. This gives us the good reason why the Israelites were so afraid, but it does leave us wondering what does their situation have to do with us?

We won’t see God’s glory up close and personal. We won’t see him coming down on a mountain and sounding a trumpet. We won’t see our personal mediator going up and speaking with him and coming down with a radiant face, but where can we see God? Well, we can look closer at the testimony Moses was carrying with him and sharing with the Israelites. What was included in the testimony Moses brought with him down the mountain?

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.” Moses was carrying the 10 Commandments with him. These commandments can give us a sense of why the Israelites were so afraid of the Lord and his glory. God says if we want to live in heaven we need to be able to keep these commandments perfectly.

How well do we do in keeping them? We can start with the first commandment which says, “You shall have no other gods.” We might think this one might be easy to keep. I’ve never been caught bowing down to a god of wood or stone. I’ve kept this one right? I need to ask myself, “Self. Have I ever demanded I get my way even if I’m wrong and it hurts other’s feelings? Have I tricked someone into do something for me because I’m too lazy to do it myself?”

Have I ever thought God’s love for me depends on how much money I have, how popular I am or how well life is going for me right now? Check. Check. Check. Three questions and three examples of the limitless times and ways I’ve broken the first commandment. Suddenly, I can understand the fear and trembling the Israelites experienced. If I want to be with God forever in heaven I can’t have any of these blemishes against me.

What solution did the Israelites come up with? “But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face.” Their solution was to cover and hide the glory of the Lord with a veil, but this solution failed because it tried to cover God’s glory rather than live in it.

What was the real solution and point of Moses’ shining face? St. Paul gives us the point of our sermon lesson today when he wrote in our second reading, “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were

made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.”

The old covenant which Moses taught the Israelites can only make us aware of sin and this awareness is like the veil which Moses wore and which covered over God’s glory. We needed someone who was able to come and remove this same veil of sin the Israelites had that covers over our hearts so we could stand with God and not be afraid of him because of the veil over our hearts. Paul tells us only Jesus makes it possible to stand God’s presence and not be afraid.

The best part of this is Jesus is one of us. He walks like us. He talks like us. He makes God approachable for us and we don’t have to be afraid because he is one of us. But every once in a while Jesus will pull back the curtain for us a little bit and remind us he is the Lord’s anointed who has come to save us and do away with the veil of sin which covers over our hearts. Today is one of those days when he reminds us he is true God as we celebrate his transfiguration.

Jesus’ transfiguration shows us he is true God and it assures us because he is true God he is perfect and has kept all of God’s commandments perfectly in our place. He is our perfect mediator who serves on our behalf. The Israelites were frightened by mediator Moses’ radiant face because it reminded them of their sin, but our mediator points to himself and reminds us he has pulled the veil of our sins away and he wants us to stand in the light of his glorious presence.

How does this happen? Paul tells us, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Paul tells us the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts and removed our veil of sin and makes us living reflections of Jesus’ glory and we grow brighter and brighter as we grow in faith we become more like him.

Compare this glory with Moses’ reflection of the glory of the Lord. The glory Moses reflected grew dim and faded away. The glory of Christ which we reflect grows and grows. Which do you think is better? The glory of Christ is better. It always will be. We can’t look at the sun unless a veil is placed over it. When it comes to God we can’t see him unless our veil of sin is removed. Jesus has removed our veil of sin. Stand in his light, bask in it and reflect it to the world which needs it. Amen.