

Exodus 34: 29-35 Luke 9: 28-43a. Our Turn to Shine

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 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, until he went in to speak with him.

On one hand, the Scripture tells us that God made us in God's image and breathed God's very breath into us, so we come alive; that God is as close to us as our own breath. The word for "breath" in both the Hebrew Scripture and the ancient Greek of the New Testament, is also the word for the Spirit. So, we are "inspired" of God's breath; we are God's "spiritual" creatures.

On the other hand, in the Bible, there's a lot of trekking up and down the mountains. It turns out that mountains are not just a random backdrop to whatever happened to be happening but a place with a special meaning; mountains are a special place of divine encounter.

Right before the passage Suzanne just read to us, God had called Moses, God's chosen, to come up to the mountain, while others waited down below. So, Moses did and spent forty days and forty nights fasting on Mount Sinai, talking with God, while he was still on the exodus journey leading the people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, to the promised land. And now he was coming down the mountain, for the second time, huffing and puffing I imagine, with two stone tablets of God's commandments in his arms.

Having been in God's presence, the skin of his face was shining. What a curious physical detail this is. It was not that his face glowed as from within, but the surface skin of his face shone. Moses was not generating the light himself; rather, his face was reflecting God's

glory he had been exposed to in the presence of God. Moses was not aware of it, but for the sake of those around him who could hardly bear it, Moses had to wear a veil when with them.

Such is the mystery of our God who is as near as our own breath and at the same time so awe-some that we can hardly bear to see the reflection of God's glory; so close and so beyond. Such is the mystery of our human nature, an inspired, spiritual-yet-physical being, capable of reflecting God's glory, even when we are not aware; we are made to shine with God's light that is beyond ours to contain. The reality we comprehend and think we live in is limited in time and space, as if by a veil, and is only part of God's reality that is beyond our awareness. Yet God gives us parts in it. Such is the beauty of the mystery of our life of faith with God. Now, to another mountain encounter. Hear now the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to **Luke 9.28-62**.

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and *went up on the mountain to pray*. ²⁹*And while he was praying*, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸Just then a man from the crowd shouted, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.' ⁴¹Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' ⁴²While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

The last few Sundays, we listened to the section in Luke's Gospel called Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, which is the Beatitudes in Luke: "blessed are you who... and woe to you who..." followed by the challenging commandment of the last week to love our enemies. These teachings are called the Sermon on the Plain or the Field because, guess what, it took place after Jesus came down from a mountain, where he had gone up *to pray* before choosing the disciples. Jesus came down the mountain, to the crowd below in the level place, who had gathered there to listen to him and to be healed, just as Moses came down to the people below, bearing God's commandments for them. But unlike Moses, Jesus was not alone, he had taken his disciples with him.

And today, Jesus was going up a mountain again, taking the inner circle of his disciples with him. And he went up *to pray* again, just as he did before. Jesus connects the mountain, a symbolic place of divine encounter, with prayer. Jesus by his own practice teaches us that prayer is where we open ourselves to the presence of God. If the mountain is a locale for meeting God, prayer is the spiritual milieu of meeting God. God meets us in both.

And while he was praying, writes Luke, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. "Oh, like Moses; God must be around!" we might think. But no, the appearance of his face "*changed*", and his clothes "*became*" dazzling white. Jesus was not merely reflecting God's glory like Moses was; rather, Jesus transformed and shone from within.

In that moment, through their sleepy eyes, the disciples saw Jesus for who truly was, the very light of God. Then they saw Moses and Elijah with him. Mt. Sinai that Moses went up to meet God is also known as Mt Horeb where Elijah, after running forty days and forty nights, waited for God and God came to him in the still small voice.

These two God's mountain climbers were now talking to Jesus, about Jesus' departure which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. It sounds awkward to say Jesus is to accomplish his departure, as if a specially challenging take-off, but the word translated here as "departure" is the word for "exodus." Moses led the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt through the wilderness to the promised land. Now they were talking about Jesus' exodus together. Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem was betrayal and death on the cross, and to the resurrection to Life Eternal, for the life of the world. But the disciple had not understood this yet.

Just as the heavenly company was leaving Jesus, Peter, shaking off his sleepiness, suggested impulsively, and perhaps instinctively, to build dwellings for each of them, right there on the mountain. Peter's instinct was to freeze the moment and capture their presence in that place. Perhaps he wanted to keep Jesus safely up there in the mountain, where he could come visit, instead of following Jesus down the mountain to the world where people awaited, hurting and hungry, the world under a tyrannical rule of the great Roman Empire.

But while Peter was still speaking, the cloud came over and covered them, and out of it came the voice. Earlier, the voice from the cloud came after Jesus had been baptized and *while he was praying*. That voice spoke *to* Jesus, calling him into his ministry. "You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." Now the voice from the cloud spoke *about* Jesus *to* the disciples who were to carry on his ministry. They are told to listen to him. The heavenly company had departed now, and as much as Peter liked to, they could not stay up there in the mountain; they were to go down the mountain where Jesus led.

So Jesus went down the mountain, with his disciples, to continue his ministry. On the mountain top, God affirmed God's Son. Down below, a father in distress asked for help for his only son. Jesus had empowered the disciples for ministry, but they were not able to heal the son. Jesus sounds somewhat let down that the disciples are not yet ready to carry out his mission on without him by their.

The day would come when the disciples would shine the light of Jesus on the darkness of the world and bring God's healing; but yet a while longer, Jesus needed to stay with them. Jesus might have lamented the faithlessness of "this generation," but he continued to bear with the disciples and eventually died for all, and rose for all, accomplishing his exodus.

So, Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit that was making the son "foam at the mouth." The unclean spirit is the language of Jesus' time for the evil, the force that oppose God and resist's God's saving and life-giving work in the world. Who do we see today "foaming at the mouth," if that is a symptom of those who are gripped by the evil spirit, the spirit that opposes God and God's kingdom. Who is foaming at the mouth around us? They are those who are captive to distress, delusion, despair, disaster, demoralization, depression, death? That is our wilderness, and God intends to deliver all of us in the exodus Jesus led.

Today, you and I are living in the post-resurrection world. Though we are about to enter the season of Lent, time of preparation to carry on the light of Christ, we know Jesus has already

accomplished his exodus, delivering us from the grip of all evil forces that held and could hold us. It is our turn to shine, the light of God that comes from the source beyond the limit of our world; we are to reflect God's light in the world at such time as this.

And when we are overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world, with people hurting the vulnerable and taking away the food from the hungry and the cure from the sick, the outrageous injustice of it all, we are to do as Jesus did, turned to prayer for wisdom in the still small voice, solitude for discernment, what come down from the mountain to act. Let us pray.