

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
February 27, 2022 – The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36 – The Transfiguration
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Every year on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ and remember the vision of Christ's glory given to his disciples, Peter, James, and John. The Collect and readings for today all relate to this important event in the life of Christ.

This morning's lesson from the book of Exodus is a portion of many chapters describing the law given by God to Moses for the guidance of God's people. God summons Moses to climb Mount Sinai alone and wait for God to give him the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. Once Moses was on the mountain, we read that "the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day [God] called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain."

In the Hebrew Bible the visual form in which God appears to human beings is usually described as fiery or as enveloped in cloud or fire. You will remember that God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. And during the exodus from Egypt, God led the people through the wilderness by going before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Scripture records that "Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights." Moses entered the presence of God and remained in God's presence for a long time. Further on in Exodus we have this morning's passage: "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." Moses' face shone with the reflected glory of God.

Now let's move forward in time approximately 1,300 years to the event recorded in Luke's Gospel. The Transfiguration of Christ occurred shortly after Jesus had first told his disciples about the suffering and death he was facing and about his resurrection: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). On the mountain Jesus is revealed, the dazzling light of his glory forever tied to his journey to Jerusalem, to his death, and to his resurrection.

On the mountain Jesus receives God's confirmation: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Luke recorded that when Jesus was baptized, at the beginning of his ministry, God spoke very similar words: "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). We are meant to understand that from the beginning to the end, through every event in the life and ministry of Jesus, this is who Jesus is – God's Son, Chosen and Beloved.

When Jesus was on the mountain, transfigured in the presence of his disciples, he talked with Moses and Elijah. Moses, the man through whom God gave the law of God to God's people, and Elijah, one of the greatest of the prophets. Elijah lived in Israel in the 9th century B.C.E. and was a great healer and miracle worker. In one sense, at the Transfiguration Jesus was having a conversation with his peers, for he was also appointed by God to teach God's ways, to fulfill the law and the prophets, and to demonstrate the power of God through miracles and healing.

But Jesus was essentially different from Moses and Elijah. The radiance the disciples saw in Jesus' face was not the reflected glory of God, as it had been for Moses. The radiance was within Jesus. The divine was within him and shining through him. What happened at the Transfiguration was that for a brief time the veil was drawn aside, and Jesus' divine nature was visible to his disciples. He was not changed or transformed. He was revealed: the beloved Son of God, different from all others, both human and divine. Christ's glory revealed in dazzling light – white light, the color of purity, of light without darkness.

Each year the vision of Christ's glory and God's words at the Transfiguration lead us into Lent. How might today's lessons help us prepare for our journey through this season?

We are made in the image of God and God's light is meant to shine through us. Jesus said to the crowds he was teaching: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 4:14-16).

As people who love God, we are called to let God's light shine through us so that it may give light to others. It may be helpful to think about this in our Lenten self-examination. How is the light of God visible to others in and through us? How might we make that light brighter? How might we remove the "bushel basket" we willingly put over God's light within us, whatever it is that dims the light?

Our lives are closely linked with others, in the world and in the church. We are called to love one another. We may think of loving others in terms of encouraging the light of God to shine through them. In our Lenten self-examination it might be useful to think of what we do and say to others that either encourages their light or dims their light. For example, do we support and encourage the goodness in others through our words and actions or do we discourage them with harsh judgment and unkind words? How might our light shine brighter by helping someone else to shine?

The Gospel of John begins with a description of Jesus as "the Word," God's power of creation and redemption. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:1-5).

The light of Christ revealed at the Transfiguration was not overcome even by death on the cross, for Christ's light shone brighter still on Easter morning. We journey through Lent from one vision of Christ's glory to another, from the Transfiguration to the glorious vision of our risen Lord at Easter. As we travel through Lent this year, may we intentionally choose the light and reflect the light of God within ourselves and for others, for the love of Christ whose light will shine forever, and to the glory of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.