

"Reflections"
The Transfiguration
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, CA.
6 August 2023

Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm 99
II Peter 1:13-21
St. Luke 9:28-36 [37-43a]

INI

The Majesty of God

When have you seen the glory of God? Many will answer with scenes of a sunset or a sunrise, in the glories of the heavens, most recently seen in the photographs from the Webb telescope. In short, nature often reflects to us the glory of God. Sometimes it is the buildings that we have built to honor God or to worship God. I can remember my feelings as I entered Saint Chapelle in Paris for the first time, or the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, or Haiga Sophia in Constantinople. We are surrounded by that same kind of beauty here at Trinity+St. Peter's as well.

The ancients of Israel saw the sea as a sign of death, but now in our own time we see photographs from the depths of the waters as beautiful, reflecting in another aspect of nature the glory of God in the forms of the creatures who live in the sea. The Psalm for this morning reflects to us the glory of God shown in the ineffable – God enthroned above all of creation. God is seen in the supernatural.

*The Lord is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.*

Perhaps we see that glory reflected in other ways.

That Glory Reflected in Human Lives

In the first reading for this morning, we see Moses in a new light. He has ascended Sinai to receive the Law from God, and when he returns to the people, they see him in a new light – his face shining as a reflection of his conversation with God. Might we entertain the possibility that God's glory can be reflected in human lives as well. The psalm for this morning remembers people who reflected God's glory, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, priests and prophets who reflected God to their time. We might add some others to the list as well. A laughing Sarah, a royal Esther, a weeping Mary Magdalene, a pondering Mary, a singing Hildegard of Bingham, Julian of Norwich – I am certain that you can come up with several candidates who reflected God's glory in their lives.

In the Moses story he feels compelled to veil the glory that shone from his face, hiding his encounter with God. Perhaps the authors of the narrative wanted us to observe a Moses in his humility, veiling his access with God. But one wonders what it would be like if all those women and men, who observed the glory of God, would have had the courage to let that encounter with God show in their very lives, in their aspect shown to others. But more about that in a moment.

God's Glory Reflected in the Ministry of Jesus

It is not just glory that meets our attention in the Gospel for today. There is much more than that. Saint Luke wants us to see God's glory reflected in the ministry of Jesus especially to those whom society would ignore or walk silently by. Peter wants to only take in the glory, and suggests that they build a permanent community there where they could adore the glorious Jesus in his majesty. Jesus, however, will have none of that. There is a silence that follow the Voice that declares: "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him.

Upon leaving the scene of glory, Jesus returns to the reality of the world. He returns to mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, all of them in need. A needy father pleads for his son to the disciples, but they are powerless to respond. It is Jesus, who mirrors the ministry that needs to be done in his name, He heals the son, and all are astounded, a Lucan clue that this healing caused them to believe. It is more than glory that we need to see in this reading, but rather see it in terms of glory, healing, presence, shown in the lives of the needy. This brings me to my final point.

God's Glory Reflected in What We Do.

In the second reading for this morning we hear God again, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We might well ask, with what is God well pleased? God's glory is reflected in what we do for others. Just as Jesus ministered to the "little ones", as Luke called them, so are we called to come down from the mountain and deal with the difficulties of living our lives in this world. Perhaps we need to learn to see God's glory reflected in the needs of our neighbors, in the neediness of this world, in the needs of Creation. Perhaps we need to see God's glory reflected and shining in the face of those we meet on the street. Once, while walking down Bancroft Avenue in Berkeley, I in my clerics, I walked through a bunch of children with their teachers and attendants. As I got to the edge of the crowd, one of the teachers called out, "Father, can you bless us?" And I did, putting my hands on little heads, and crown up heads, all of them looking at me with a sense of glory shining in their faces. It made my day. May we all learn to touch the other, and see the glory of God.