

## “Seeing More Clearly”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

February 27, 2022 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

### **Scripture Text: Exodus 34:29-35**

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. <sup>32</sup> Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup> When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> 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.

### **Meditation – Part 1**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have always found the story of Moses and his shining face to be rather awesome, literally. I am in awe of the whole event. One could not speak with God face to face, one could not look upon the face of God, but whenever the great prophet went into the divine presence he would experience a transformation and the people would see the effects of God’s presence in the face of their beloved leader. How could Moses not be changed when spending time in the presence of the Creator, Yahweh, the God of Israel? How could anyone stay the same after such a transformational experience?

The best part is Moses didn’t know his face was shining! He picked up the tablets on which God’s commandments were etched and headed back down the mountain to teach them to the people. It wasn’t until Aaron and the others saw him and backed off in fear that he knew anything had changed in any obvious way. I’m sure he felt changed in his heart and mind – how could he not – but how could he have known it would be apparent to everyone else? The people didn’t know what to think, and it frightened them. I think that’s fairly understandable. I’m guessing we would have a similar reaction to someone’s skin shining with a Godly light.

Have you ever watched one of those documentaries that talk about extra-terrestrial beings in the universe? There are some pretty far-fetched theories out there! I’m not one to say whether we are alone in the universe or not, and it isn’t a personal priority to find out, or even give it much thought. I occasionally watch these shows simply out of my interest in human nature – what people believe, what fascinates them, how they understand the cosmos. A common theme about so-called alien sightings or evidence is glowing lights – orbs in the sky, or suspended in a forest, that kind of thing. People are fascinated and sometimes frightened by them. I’m not sure I buy into the alien theory, but I am intrigued by the human attraction to light. We are drawn to it, whether we can explain it or not.

So when Moses came down the mountain with his face inexplicably glowing, the people were frightened, and yet they responded when Moses called them to hear what he had to say. And every time he would re-emerge from being in the presence of God, the people would know where he'd been because they recognized the light. They knew he had been in the presence of the Divine. His transformation was one that drew them in, and their lives were changed by what he would say, what he would teach, as he radiated the light of having experienced God, of having received from God what the people needed to hear.

*The skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God (v. 29).* How remarkable. We will hear people referred to as glowing with good news, or their eyes are sparkling with excitement, or they wear a beaming smile. Moses shone. Could there be a more fitting response to being in God's presence, talking with the Lord, receiving the Word of the Lord in such a direct way? I suppose it's what we do with that light that brings transformation to the world, or at least to the people that experience the light of God shining within us.

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## **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

<sup>12</sup> Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; <sup>16</sup> but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

## **Meditation – Part 2**

One day when heaven was filled with His praises  
 One day when sin was as [dark] as could be  
 Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin  
 Dwelt among [us] my example is He  
 The Word became flesh and the light shined among us  
 His glory revealed...

Those are the lyrics from the first verse of one of my favourite songs, "Glorious Day" by Casting Crowns.<sup>1</sup> When it comes up on my playlist or I crank up the volume. The entire song reaches into my heart and fills it with the Gospel summed up.

Jesus came to be the light of the world;  
 Jesus entered the ultimate darkness of death;  
 Jesus won the battle between the light and the darkness;

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<sup>1</sup> John Wilbur Chapman | Mark Hall | Michael Bleecker

One day the skies will shine with his glory forever.  
 (Chorus) Living He loved me dying He saved me  
 Buried He carried my sins far away  
 Rising He justified freely forever  
 One day He's coming  
 O glorious day...

When Moses shone with God's light, he put a veil over his face whenever he finished speaking God's word to the people. The light of God's presence was veiled. The apostle asserts the people's minds were veiled when they heard the word spoken, and that even today there is a veil that prevents them from hearing the word as revealed in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ because they do not turn to him to hear. Or perhaps it is correct to say they hear, but they do not listen. There is a difference.

I have been in conversations recently where I was struck by how people listened to each other, not just heard each other. When someone would make a comment, someone else would ask for clarification, or confirmation of what had been said. If it was misunderstood, the speaker would be given a chance to further explain so the statement was clearer for us. When these conversations are on Zoom, we miss the body language and "feel" of the room, so it's important to make sure we are understanding what is being said. Some of these discussions have been about people wanting to be truly heard when they express what they are feeling, what their experiences have been, what they need for healing and moving forward. Truly hearing someone means we are truly listening, not just taking in the words but striving to understand what is being said, which involves far more than the spoken word alone. You've heard the phrase that a light dawns when we understand. When we hear the Word of God as revealed in Jesus, the ultimate light dawns. Jesus' light dawns. The light of the Holy Spirit helps us hear and see more clearly. In our worship we pray a prayer for understanding, also called a prayer for illumination. We need the Spirit to shine the light of wisdom and clarity for us to be able to understand. And when we don't quite get it, we can ask for more clarity, deeper wisdom. God has endless patience for us as we try to really listen to what is being said, not just hear the words. For in truly listening we truly hear, and we are transformed by what we hear.

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### **Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now 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. <sup>33</sup> Just 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. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my

Chosen; listen to him!”<sup>36</sup> When 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.

### **Meditation – Part 3**

Glory. Dazzling. Shining. The theme continues. There is light. There is hearing and listening. There is awe. This time though, God is not only present but speaks directly to the frightened men enveloped in an unexpected cloud. *This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!* This is more than hearing God’s voice. This is a commandment to listen to God’s Son. In Moses’ story there was a veil that limited understanding. In the Gospel story there is a cloud of shadow within which the message is abundantly clear. This is Jesus. This is God’s Son. This is the One to whom the disciples should be listening as closely as they can, seeking clarification in their limited understanding. And in this story, God has the last word. Moses and Elijah disappear, Jesus returns to his usual self. The disciples are silent as they take it all in. After Peter’s awkward suggestion, the only voice heard is God’s.

Did the disciples understand what had happened? They recognized the prophets who appeared to talk with Jesus. Did they know the significance of that moment? I wonder if they heard what the three men were talking about. The text tells us they saw the three talking together, but did they hear what was being said? We are told Jesus was changed in his appearance, and yet the disciples make no comment on it. What does it all mean? It all seems rather complicated. Perhaps it is simpler than it seems. Perhaps this is all about one understanding – that Jesus is who he says he is, will do what he said he would do, and his words are to be truly heard. How many times and in how many different ways do these disciples have to be told before they get it? And we are told the conversation between the three men is about what Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem. I would love to know what the great prophets said to Jesus, but that’s just a matter of my own curiosity.

“In [the previous chapter], Jesus tells his disciples that he will suffer, be rejected, be killed, and on the third day raised from the dead. The disciples hear these words, but they do not understand. Their misunderstanding is revealed when Peter, eager to please, offers to make three dwellings for the three prophets before him on the mountain: one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah. Peter had in mind *Sukkot*, the Jewish feast of tabernacles when all Israelites were to dwell in handmade booths like the fragile shelters the Israelites had in exile, to remind them that God delivered them out of the land of Egypt and to look forward to the coming Messiah. But Jesus had just told his disciples that he was the one they were looking forward to, that he was the fulfillment of Israel’s laws and prophecies. The disciples heard the words of Jesus, but they did not understand.

“ ‘Listen to him!’ God bellows from the mountaintop cloud. Does God sound exasperated to you? ‘This is my Son, my Chosen.’ How many different ways do the disciples have to hear this message before they come to understand it? *What does Jesus have to do or say before we really listen?*”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://pres-outlook.org/2022/02/transfiguration-sunday-february-27-2022/> (italics mine)

My supervisor from my summer of student chaplaincy at a Toronto hospital had a favourite phrase in teaching pastoral support: to be listened to is to be loved. I have always agreed. It isn't the only way to know we are loved, but it is a significant element. When we really hear the words of another, we show we really care about what they are saying, feeling, experiencing. We show we really care about that person, enough to take the time to block out distractions and pay full attention to what they want to share with us. Turn off the phone, close the laptop, turn off the TV. Listen. Listen carefully and seek clarification if we do not understand, and or want to make sure we've heard things correctly.

This is also a way to show our love for God, through Christ. It's easy to give a token read of the Scriptures, to half-listen to a reading, to avoid the things God says that make us uncomfortable. But giving our full attention to the Word and how we are guided to live within it is a much more difficult thing for us to do. When we see and understand more clearly, we may not be thrilled about what is being said. We may not want to be moved out of the comfortable pew and into a life of serving God by serving others, especially those with whom we may not be comfortable. It is sometimes difficult to really listen to someone's story because stories are not always easy to hear. It is sometimes difficult to tell our own story because it's not an easy story to tell. But if someone is really listening, entering into that sacred space we are sharing, the story is met with care and concern, with love. And when we are the one invited into the sacred space, we are given an opportunity to really listen, really love. We can be present, just as Christ is present with us when we enter into sacred space with him.

God is always ready to give full attention to our words, our prayers, our stories. We know we are loved by God in a variety of ways, and one of those ways is in the confidence that our loving Creator listens to us, really hears what we say, what we pray. If we really listen, really hear what God is saying to us through Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we will see and understand more clearly, and be more in tune with God's Word and Way. When we only hear what we want to hear, instead of what God is actually saying, we miss the blessing of a deeper communion with the Lord.

So, when God says to the disciples, "listen to my Son!" we will do well to open our own ears, minds, and hearts to what Jesus says, for that command is directed to us too. Jesus' voice has been heard by generations of faithful disciples, and it will be heard by generations yet to come. By listening and really hearing what he says now, we will be able to help others hear and see more clearly. God helps us understand... if we are willing to really hear. Amen.