

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Exodus 34:29-35

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

Commentary

This passage from Exodus relates a similar experience in the life of Moses, the 2 Corinthians passage refers to the Moses event, and the psalm addresses an awesome God who is worshipped at a holy mountain. The experience with God on the mountaintop transfigured Moses. There was an aura of radiance about him showing that he had been with God. Aaron and the people were so stunned by this sight—there is something almost forbidding about someone who exhibits a special relationship with the Divine. They didn't quite know what to make of it. The veil Moses places on his head was likely a ritual mask, made of burnished metal, decorated with symbolic ornaments, and used in liturgical rites to give priests or prophets personal anonymity while emphasizing his sacred, ceremonial role. Each time Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting, when he came out donning the veil to shield the people from his brilliance to let them contemplate the awesome, life-changing step they were taking.

Reflection

This story suggests that humans can be altered because they have been in the presence of God. How does being in the presence of God change you?

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

^{3:12} Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ 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. ^{4:1} Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Commentary

Paul is a minister of the new covenant, which is not based on lifeless commandments chiseled in stone, which are inevitably destroyed. Rather, we are led by Christ's Spirit, bringing life and hope to the world—and this passage is an example of the contrast of the old covenant of Moses with the new one in Christ. The glory of redemption in Christ is sure and lasting—this gives us the confidence to proclaim the gospel openly, whereas Moses had to obscure his message that could not endure. Only when we seek God in Christ, Paul says, can this veil be torn away. Only the Spirit of God brings freedom from the limitations and judgment of the law. Because Paul had experienced this situation of separation from God himself early in life, he knew it to be true. He had no need to try to trick people into believing through manipulation or false argument (as his adversaries in the Corinthian church contended). He could be completely open, under God, in presenting himself and the message of salvation to the conscience of his hearers. Paul had no need for the veil of Moses.

Reflection

Paul completely reverses the meaning of the veil—from symbolizing God's grandeur to obscuring God's grace. Can religious practices obscure God's graces?

Luke 9:28-43

^{9:28} 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. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹ Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴² While 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. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Commentary

The word transfiguration is a translation from a Greek word that means "a change of form." Luke, however, does not use this word, choosing one instead that means, simply, "changed." The difference, to us, is slight and subtle; but the former term should have suggested to the Gentiles the frequent metamorphoses of heathen gods from one form to another in Greek and Roman mythology. It is significant that this event took place just a week after Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, in contrast to the view of crowds that He was merely another prophet. So they knew He was the Messiah, and they knew He would be rejected and persecuted for making this claim. They knew, because of this truth, they had a choice to make. Perhaps in leading the three closest to Him to this time of prayer, Jesus hoped this experience would help them make that choice for the trials to come or further convince them of His true identity. While there, however, an epiphany, or divine manifestation, occurred. (This is the last Sunday in the season after the Epiphany.) They saw God's glory in the face of Jesus and realized His connection with Moses (the Torah tradition) and Elijah (the prophetic tradition). The luminescence of Jesus' face was obscured by a cloud (veil?), and a voice confirmed what Peter confessed—Jesus was God's chosen one. The disciples, despite their mountaintop experience, remained pretty much the same. Coming down, they had the opportunity to perform an act of mercy but could not. Jesus healed the boy, in the end, by Himself.

Reflection

Do mountaintop experiences have value in and of themselves? Or must their effectiveness depend on demonstrated deeds of faith and compassion because of these experiences?

- ^{99:1} The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
- ² **The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.**
- ³ Let them praise your great and awesome name.
Holy is he!
- ⁴ Mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity;
**you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.**
- ⁵ Extol the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he!
- ⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called on his name.
They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.
- ⁷ **He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;**
they kept his decrees,
and the statutes that he gave them.
- ⁸ **O LORD our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.**
- ⁹ Extol the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the LORD our God is holy.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**