

03.02.25 ~ Transfiguration Sunday

“The Hospitality of God”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Exodus 34:29-35 ^{NIV}

The Radiant Face of Moses

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.

³² Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai.

³³ When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ But whenever he entered the Lord’s presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

Leader: These Words of Wonder Are from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Luke 9:28-36 ^{NLT}

The Transfiguration

²⁸ About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. ³¹ They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

³² Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus’ glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, “Master, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ³⁴ But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

³⁵ Then a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn’t tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Leader: These Illuminating Words Are of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God of Heaven, we thank you for our time spent with you this week and already today. We gather again to worship you in fellowship, praise, and wonder. We sit here burdened and confused with our world, but know you are sovereign. Help us to hear **your** message of kingdom purpose and your hospitality. Let us admit that being

earth-bound limits our own thoughts of you. So please clear our minds, Lord, to receive your direction from these passages; let us apply it personally and as a church. May **your** voice renew, refresh, and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Yes, it is March! But it feels more like January. If you need a prayer shawl or blanket feel free to get up to get one; they are on that central pew. In the choir anthem, we saw how a small hyphen, because of auto-correct, could change the meaning of a whole hymn: God in man (should have been a comma), made manifest. The hymn takes us from Jesus' birth, epiphany, teaching and miracles to today's passage of transfiguration, and onward toward the cross and resurrection. Today is the first hearing of it, but we will sing it again later as a congregational hymn. Nothing in today's passages is man-made, I assure you! Both of these passages remind us of the divine power and kingdom understanding needed by all disciples.

Prior to the Exodus verse came the Ten Commandments tablets. The word of God's Law was communicated through Moses on tangible, solid stone tablets, yet here in these passages, we hear of and imagine the divine illumination of God and his presence on Mount Sinai because of Moses' shining face when he returned. This time his face radiated with the glory of God, but he didn't even realize it. The people were afraid, so he covered his face with a veil when he was in their presence and took it off when he came into the presence of God. There is one commentary that suggests he veiled his face so the people wouldn't see God's glory fading; of course, it came back through Jesus' own radiance in our other passage today. Moses was not just a communicator for God, although the people thought that at first. The change to his facial appearance assured the

people that Moses was the embodiment of God's word; he represented God in physical form too they thought. That is, until Jesus' own transfiguration with God's glory on top of Mount Hermon (a few say it was Mount Tabor). I suggest that God's glory was witnessed in both men (in both passages we read today) as the divine hospitality of God through human communion, and made manifest in each, Moses and Jesus. Though the Israelites now had stone tablets as tangible proof, the illumination from Moses' face evokes a vitality and energy of supernatural power and glory.

We have studied our Luke passage many times before; the definition of transfiguration is: "a change in form or appearance: metamorphosis, or an exalting, glorifying, or spiritual change." For Christians and I would say the disciples present, Peter, James, and John, it was a foretaste of glories of the kingdom to come. Jesus had been teaching and took three of his disciples up to the mountain to pray. Moses and Elijah appeared just as Jesus's face and clothes flashed with lightening. The three disciples fell asleep right at the beginning of their prayer, much like they did in the gardens at Gethsemane. When they awoke, they saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah! Peter couldn't fathom this heavenly witness and assumed the world was ending!

Peter offered only what he could imagine to be helpful—to build three shelters or tabernacles for each of these great Godly men for comfort and worship. Not much is written about this but most commentaries ridicule Peter's offer. He does not understand the heavenly versus earthly needs of these men, but I suggest it was the only thing in

Peter's earthbound imagination he could propose. It reminds me of the difference between Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42:

³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made . . . ⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Mary wanted to absorb whatever she could from Jesus, knowing in her heart that he was God's son, and Martha offered only what she could as an offering of sorts—hospitality and a meal. Don't we do that too? I relate to Peter and Martha a bit here. What would you do if these historical and spiritual giants—Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—appeared?

We humans cannot always understand the awe and wonder of kingdom signs; we don't even have clear words to describe our faith journeys! I don't blame Peter at all; Luke's account is trying to teach us to look beyond the earthly comforts of living and to look beyond our earthly vision into the heavenlies. Not all of us have prophetic vision, however, and so we must rely on Scripture and prayer to internalize this message. However, as we learned in previous years of study, if we practice the spiritual disciplines of contemplation, meditation, study, and serving others, we will be blessed by holy insights, beauty, dreams, and imagination. We will be able to welcome **God's hospitality** first into our hearts, homes, and churches, and then act accordingly in his direction to offer God our hospitality through what we offer to others: comfort, food, drink, shelter, love, patience, mercy, grace, and faith.

Both types of hospitality are needed, and in this case, reciprocal hospitality **is desired**, recognizing God's hospitality first, then modelling

that divine and vital hospitality to and for others. Going back to our short hyphen typo: our relationship with the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) does not **depend** on our people-pleasing actions. They neither save us nor serve us; however, we are called upon to serve others and acts of kindness do matter, as long as they are done with humility and with nothing expected in return. Remember God's grace is given freely; Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected on our behalf as children of God, and for no other conditional reason. You cannot earn mercy or grace. This is the quandary: are you obedient for a reason or are you obedient for love? Did Peter want to build shelters to please his teacher, or was he showing his commitment the only way he knew how? Are we offering things to others to please or out of the love we have to share? Let us remember the voice that came from the cloud reassuring the disciples and preparing them: "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." Will you accept this hospitality from God to **receive** his salvation, sanctification, and eternal life, and then to live it out every day? That is the profound question that leads and testifies to the *Vital Hospitality* of God. More food for thought. Amen! ||

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your teaching, your example, and your presence. Open our minds to accept the divine illumination that comes with these Godly men. Give us your insights personally and as a church to answer the call to hospitality for 2025. May you build our understanding of these indescribable kingdom glories to come so that you alone fuel our mission and purpose, reminding us of healthy and loving reasons to serve you and to share our faith. Please bless these communion elements as we remember you. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.