

Transfiguration
February 7, 2016
Exodus 34:29-35
God Permits a View of His Glory
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Relevant preaching is a main attraction for churches today. Preaching always needs to be timely. Relevant is different. For me, relevant does not equal “changing with the times.” I equate relevant with biblical. What is more relevant in my daily life than the changeless truths that are God’s Word?

Those truths are very old. We may dress those truths in new clothes, so to speak, to make them timely. But clothes do not make the man. The essence of those truths have not changed with the times. It is for that very reason those truths are just as relevant, i.e. just as useful and practical for every Christian today, as they always have been.

The relevant truth on this last Sunday of Epiphany, Transfiguration, is this: **God Permits a View of His Glory**. First, the glory of the Sinaitic law in Moses’ face. Second, the glory of the Spirit’s ministry in the gospel in Jesus’ face.

Moses had gone up Mt. Sinai to meet the LORD and receive the Sinaitic law on two tablets of stone. When Moses came down, he found the people worshipping the golden calves. Moses broke the tablets because the people had broken the covenant.

Would the LORD now forsake his people because of their great sin? Moses went back to God and interceded on Israel’s behalf. He said to God, “What a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin.”

The LORD forgave their sin and promised to remain with them on their journey to the Promised Land. His presence remained in the Tabernacle. Moses often met with God there. In all these instances, the LORD did not show Moses his glory. Moses asked the LORD to see his glory and the LORD agreed but not his full glory. This would have killed Moses.

The glory of the LORD is his full power, majesty, authority, holiness, and righteousness in his actions. Those attributes and actions shine with the brightness of a million suns. Moses received just a peek as the LORD passed by him so in human terms Moses saw only the LORD’s back. The LORD then gave Moses the Sinaitic law again on new tablets.

When Moses brought those tablets to the people, the people could see the reflection of God’s glory in Moses’ face after he had spoken with the LORD. That brings us to these relevant verses of Exodus 34. God’s holy law, the Ten Commandments, the Old Covenant, is the LORD’s glory of his holiness. Moses’ face reflected the glory of God’s righteous will and his command that we keep that will holy.

Moses veiled this glory from the people for two reasons. One, to hide the radiance of the glory. The glory of the law strikes fear into our hearts. We all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. We are guilty and deserve death and hell because we have broken the law with our sins. Our transgression of God’s law condemns us to eternal separation from God’s presence and blessings.

The second reason is the reflection of that glory in Moses’ face faded. The Apostle Paul adds explanation with his words to the Corinthians, “the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was.” [2 Corinthians 3:9]

Paul goes on to show that though the law is glorious, fading as it is, the greater glory lies in the ministry of the Spirit. The law's glory reflected in Moses' face. The ministry of the Spirit in the gospel is reflected in Christ's face. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians in our second lesson, "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." [2 Cor. 4:6]

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, shined out at his Transfiguration that radiant glory of the success of his redemptive work. The three disciples, Peter, James and John, saw Jesus' holiness as God. They saw it only partially, like Moses, and that little bit blinded the disciples and struck fear in them. The holiness of God does that.

The Father's voice spoke as he had at Jesus' baptism preaching that sweet assurance that Jesus is his Son he sent into the world to earn our forgiveness. Moses was there representing that Old Covenant of glory that was fading under the greater glory of the Spirit's ministry in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Elijah was there representing the prophets of old.

Get it? Moses and the prophets, the Old Testament that revealed the coming of the Savior. We see in Jesus the glory of God's grace in his righteous act of redeeming us in his Son. Jesus is the New Covenant, the greater glory. Jesus shines so much brighter than the law. Though the law that condemns is glorious, the ministry of the Spirit that brings us the righteousness of Christ shines even brighter. This is why we need to hear both the law and gospel. The glory of the law shows us our sin and makes us tremble before God's holiness. The gospel shows us our Savior and comforts our hearts secure in Christ's holiness under the law the Father has imputed to us. The gospel takes precedence.

Jesus' Transfiguration is relevant in that it assures us that even though Jesus would suffer and die on the cross, he would conquer all our enemies; sin, death and the devil.

Israel knew when they saw Moses' face that God still loved them and would take care of them in spite of their sin. We see in Jesus' face nothing has changed, in fact, all promises have been kept.

The cross and grave loomed ahead for our Lord. They would not in any way, however, diminish his glory as our Savior. They would lead to his return to the full glory he had with the Father before he came into the world. They lead to our glory with the Father as well in heaven. Amen.

<SDG>