

Exodus 34: 29-35

We have looked many times and at many different stories in the Bible and through history of people who have been changed by an experience of the presence of God. We have frequently noted that nobody could really encounter God and failed to be changed in some way by the experience. As we have been working our way through the life of Jesus since Christmas, we have talked about how everybody who experienced Jesus was changed, from the shepherds on the night of His birth who left glorifying and praising God, to the Magi who went home different people than when they came, to the first disciples who dropped everything and followed Him at a simple word, to the people who heard Him teach about what it really meant to be in right relationship with God in a way that turned everything they thought they knew about God upside down. Those stories continue to today and beyond.

All those people were changed in unique ways, but rarely do we see something like we find in this story from Exodus. Here we add something about an experience of the presence of God that is not so common – the physical appearance of Moses was changed by this encounter with God.

READ Exodus 34:29-35

When we think about it, why should our physical appearance **not** be changed by our encounters with God? I don't mean necessarily glowing so brightly that other people need sunglasses, but shouldn't people of God be different? Shouldn't there be something about us – about the way we do things, the way we treat other people, the way we manage our priorities – that causes people to notice?

When I was in college, I worked for an engineering firm. One of the things I learned how to do was make blueprints. Nobody does this anymore, including at the engineering firm I work for now, so this knowledge is now just another of the many useless things I know. Oh, well. Anyway, to make a blueprint, you had to have a special kind of paper that had to be stored in the dark, and a special kind of light. You put the paper and whatever you were copying into the machine where the paper was exposed to just the right kind of light, and it left the permanent imprint of the original on the paper. After you had made the blueprint, you could leave it in the light without a problem. But if you just left the unexposed paper lying out

on the table, it would be exposed to the wrong kind of light and the result would be a blank sheet of paper. But with the right exposure to the right light, you would get a permanent image of the original.

Isn't that our objective – to have imprinted on us the permanent image of the original? That blueprint paper is useful for us to think about when we consider the effects of exposure to the presence of God. That is obviously the right light. Exposure to that light will change us, will imprint the image of the original on us, and will protect us against the effects of the wrong kind of light. When Isaiah talked about the great light that the people walking in darkness had seen, it was this light of the Incarnation of God in the Messiah that he was talking about. When John opened his Gospel with that great prologue about the light, and said that the light of the world had come and dwelt among us, that was the right kind of light. It was the light of the presence of God, Emmanuel, with us.

Moses had been on the mountain for forty days, receiving the word of God. This was his second trip up there. The first time, when Moses came down the mountain carrying the stone tablets on which God had engraved the Ten Commandments, he found the people dancing around a golden calf that they had made as an idol for themselves, and he smashed the tablets on it. God had Moses make some new tablets and go back up the mountain.

When Moses came down the mountain the second time, he was different. He had been exposed to the light, to the presence of God, and he was different. I can't help it, but I cannot read any part of this story without my imagination of it being right out of the movie "The Ten Commandments". I don't know how they did the special effects in the movie, but Charlton Heston was truly glowing after that second trip up the mountain.

There are some things we can learn from this story, as you might have expected, as we consider the possibilities of our own experience in the light.

1. Moses had this experience of God's presence because he asked for it. Moses was beginning to understand the whole mission that God had called him to. Getting the people out of Egypt was just the first part. It was not enough to just get them out of slavery; they also had to be established as a people in freedom. Is it not the same way for us? When we are led out of slavery to sin by the grace of God, we are not just left standing on the curb with no direction. God gives us a path to freedom in His grace, and He uses His people to show us that

path. Moses was seeing the whole picture, and he knew that he would have to have the presence of God with him if he was to achieve what God had called him to do. Moses asked God to show him God's presence, and God did it in a way that was just exactly what Moses needed.

We need to understand that point. Moses clearly understood that God had called him for a purpose, and that purpose was continually being revealed to him. God didn't give him the whole plan at once, but called Moses to follow and respond in faith all along the way. Moses was reluctant enough just knowing the first step; if God had revealed the whole thing to Moses at once, even a burning bush might not have moved him. Moses didn't then just take God's direction and go charging off on his own. He knew that he needed the presence of God with him, and he asked for it, and God gave him what he needed. That's a multi-layered lesson there – hearing God's call, getting up to answer it, acknowledging our own limitations, accepting our dependence and claiming our reliance on God, asking for God's help, and receiving whatever we need to effectively carry out our calling. It works the same way for us as it did for Moses. We may not be leading hundreds of thousands of people through the wilderness, but under the commission of Christ we are leading people to freedom from the power of sin and the certainty of death, and God's presence provides what we need, when we need it. We may not know the whole plan, and maybe the whole plan would terrify us, but God will reveal it as we need it, and equip us for it all along the way.

2. Moses was unaware of his radiance. I don't think we should interpret that as ignorance, but as humility. Moses knew that something special had happened to him on that mountain, and he knew that the something special was due to the presence of God. But it took other people to see the change in Moses. Moses had not asked for the experience of the presence of God for himself, so he could go back to the people and say "I saw God" and have the people ooh and aah over him. Moses asked for the experience of the presence of God as empowerment for fulfillment of what God had called him to do. Look at where this came from:

READ Exodus 33:12-17

The radiance that resulted from this experience was not the radiance of Moses – it was the radiance of God. Moses knew that whatever he had was of God, not of himself.

3. Exposure to the presence of God has dramatic results. Moses came down from that mountain a different person than when he went up. When he came down, he had the radiance of the presence of God, and the people were afraid of him. What they were afraid of was God. It was the power given him by God that made Moses fearsome – just ask Pharaoh. Pharaoh was certainly not afraid of Moses, but he sure came to be afraid of the power of God. The people were afraid of the power of God in Moses because they were not in right relationship with God. In that circumstance, they were right to be afraid, and to seek the same freedom from fear that we seek in right relationship with God through His grace. Every aspect of God – His love, His grace, His judgment, His mercy, His conviction, His forgiveness – all of that overwhelms our ability to comprehend, and if we are outside of right relationship with Him, fear is the natural response. Our salvation – which comes through confession, repentance, and faith – is the only way to be free of that fear and live in peace with God.

Moses came down from that mountain transformed by the power of God into a person that the people could not ignore. That can be you, or me, or anybody else who seeks the presence of God and is open to God working through us.

4. Finally, for the presence of God to have been of value to anybody but Moses, Moses had to come down from the mountain. The work to be done was with the people on the ground.

If you have had a mountaintop experience of the presence of God – a retreat, a revival, some special worship experience, some personal revelation – you did not want it to end. But just like Moses' experience, our experiences of God are for a purpose: to empower us to be the people of God and radiate the glory of God to the world. Moses' real work was not on the mountain; it was with the people. So it is with us and our experiences of God. Fulfillment of the commission of Christ to all His people means that we come down off the mountain – or go out these doors – and use the power of God to accomplish His purposes in the world.

God offers us the experience of His presence all the time, and it is only ourselves – our pride, our self-centeredness – that keep us from taking it in. If we will acknowledge our need for Him and invite His presence into the depths of our being, His power will fill us up. People will be asking what happened to us, because we will be changed, we will be renewed, we will be transformed, we will be radiant with the glow of the Holy Spirit, and we will take on the

image of the original. Are we prepared for that? Are we prepared to be different, to be not just transformed ourselves but to be agents of transformation in the world? Are we prepared to be so dramatically changed, so radically different? That is precisely what real life in Christ prepares us to be, because the image of the original is that of maybe the most radical person the world has ever known. The original – Jesus Christ – turned the world upside down, and God calls us to do the same - to be the people Paul described: “...we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, [are] being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.”

Step into the light and become the image of the original.