

Sermon, February 27, 2022

Exodus 34:29-35

The Shining Face of Moses”

The story of Genesis begins with, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light; and there was light”. This makes light the firstborn of Creation. There’s one aspect of this that I have found perplexing. We know that our source of light is the sun, yet, according to the Genesis story, the sun did not exist until the fourth day of Creation. But it occurs to me that the light referred to is not natural light, but something of a spiritual nature. In fact, the word light appears in the Bible 275 times, and in a large percentage of that it is spoken of in a spiritual way. Among other things it speaks of the glory of the Lord, and as Isaiah writes, we are invited to walk in the light of the Lord!

In this morning’s reading, Moses comes down off of Mt.Sinai carrying the tablets that contain the Ten Commandments, and his face shone with a bright light that frightened the Israelites. We are told that the reason is that he had talked to God. In the previous chapter we find that God appeared before Moses in the form of a pillar of cloud, and are told, “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses’ face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

In a broader context we find such things that occur in the Bible are called a theophany, which refers to an event that speaks of the presence of God. Such light exuding from someone, as with Moses, symbolizes that this person is an emissary of God, authorized to reveal God’s message to people. In the case of Moses, the revelation of God’s law for his people.

Today is transfiguration day, which also involves light. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus takes Peter, John, and James to a mountaintop, just as Moses had talked with God on top of Mt.Sinai to pray. In the ancient world mountaintops were often perceived as the home of the gods. In fact, the early Hebrews had believed that Yahweh lived on top of Mt. Sinai. It is also significant that Peter, John, and James were taken with Jesus. They were the first disciples called, and each will become some of the most important leaders of the early church.

As they prayed the appearance of Jesus’ face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white, once more indicating that he not only bears a message from God, but that he himself is the message. As he stands transfigured, Moses and Elijah appear beside Jesus in glory, meaning that they too were engulfed in the light. Now, why these two great figures from the Old Testament? First, because ancient Hebrew traditions foretold that those two would reappear just before the coming of the Messiah. Secondly, they represent the two pillars of the Hebrew faith. Moses represents the law, and Elijah represents the prophets. Remember that a Pharisee had asked Jesus, what was the most important commandment, and he replied, “You Shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” ...And the second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets.” Keeping that in mind, imagine the image of Jesus glorified in light, flanked on either side by Moses and Elijah. There you have the law and the prophets- and what is in the center? Love! That which binds all things together.

In the gospels of both Matthew and John, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world". The word, 'light', in a biblical context, refers to life, but more than just biological life. It is a life of depth and meaning. In a Christian context it speaks of a life intimately related to the spirit of Jesus Christ. In the fifth chapter of Thessalonians we hear, "For you are all children of light, children of the day." And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says "...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven." Because we share in the light of Christ, we have a responsibility to share that light with the world. We must be people of faith, people of hope, and people of love. These qualities reside at the heart of the light. And, as Jesus said, the light that we share with him is also revealed in the good we do - especially in terms of our care and service to the weak, the vulnerable, and those who suffer.

Today, we live in a world filled with much darkness, and it must be the church's mission to bring light into the dark. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only bringing great pain and suffering to the Ukrainians, but to many Russians as well; and holds the potential of escalating to the point of becoming a threat to the whole world. To dispel such a bleak outcome, the church must speak out loud and clear, advocating for justice and peace. In the Beatitudes, Jesus did not say, 'Blessed are those who wish for peace' - he said, "Blessed are the peace - **makers!**" Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war!"

Pray that the church might find the will and the way to bring its light into this terrible darkness!
Amen.

Let us pray: God, most loving and gracious, we believe in your presence among us. As we look ahead to the season of Lent, we look to you for forgiveness and for the freedom of spirit that we find in your Son Jesus. Cleanse us of sin that we may walk in the way of the Lord. We bless you for that Son through whom your light shines so brightly, for we know that in that light there is faith, hope and love. We are living in dark and dangerous times, and ask you show us the way of justice and peace. We ask that your Holy Spirit be among those who suffer, especially those who suffer under tyrants and the evils of war! May your church be faithful to its task to be makers of peace. Give your children in Ukraine hope for their future and may that hope to spread around the world. Let your light shine through us in these dark days. Give to your church here and around the world the faith that we need to bring your light into all the dark places that plague our very existence. And may we know and remember, whatever the future may bring, your Son's promise that he would be with us always. In him we place our trust, all to the glory of your holy name. And may this Ash Wednesday be a day of prayer, praying that peace may reign on Earth. Amen.