

The stubborn people keep doing it again- abandoning the path God has commanded them (Ex. 32:8). The Israelites cannot help themselves. They have no patience (after having been freed from slavery in Egypt and brought to the wilderness to wander for forty years). In their impatience they demand to Moses' brother, Aaron, that he build them gods who can actually lead them (Ex. 32:1). Moses is taking way too long up on the mountain with God. So right before today's story in the Book of Exodus, the Israelites, with the help of Aaron, built a shiny, golden calf to worship. God was really angry and wanted to write them off but Moses pleads with God on the mountain, defending the Israelites and reminding God of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Now I know some people who say that God doesn't change God's mind but here in Exodus, God does (Ex. 32:14). God decides to offer mercy- yet again- to the people. But when Moses heads down the mountain with the two tablets and sees the golden calf with his own eyes, he loses it, smashing the tablets into pieces. He then throws the golden calf into the fire and grounds the remnants into a fine powder; puts it into drink form and makes the people drink it (Ex. 32:20). Then Moses decided they had been punished enough and went back up Mt. Sinai alone and asked God for forgiveness- taking two new tablets with him. Moses was up there for forty days and forty nights without any bread or water (34:28). While up there, Moses also asks to see God's "glory" (Ex. 33:18), God's very essence. God refuses that bold request of seeing God's glory (God's face) but does reveal to Moses God's goddness (God's back). The revelation is in verses 6 and 7 of this chapter. Passing by Moses, God proclaims, "The LORD! The LORD! a God who is compassionate and merciful, very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness, showing great loyalty to a thousand generations, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion, yet by no means

clearing the guilty.” After this revelation and the writing on the tablets, Moses heads back down the mountain. And here’s where we pick up in today’s biblical story in the OT. I’m also reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians about this Exodus story that reveals God’s glory. Before turning to God’s word, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ Exodus 34: 29-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:15-4:1.**

When I was studying abroad in Beijing, China, learning the language, Mandarin, proved to be quite challenging. I remember a friend of mine went to dinner at a host family’s home. For dinner jiaozi or Chinese dumplings were prepared. The best jiaozi had thin, translucent skin. My friend, trying to compliment the chef, told her (in front of her husband) that the skin on her rearend was very thin. Let’s just say that everyone at the table put down their chopsticks and the room fell silent. My friend knew that he had made a grave mistake. There is a slight tone difference in the words for jiaozi and backside. However, I still say that English is a much more complicated language to learn, as so many words can sound the same but have multiple meanings. Do you ever wonder how words in scripture got translated from their original languages? There is a Hebrew word, “qeren,” which is translated here as “shone” but it often also can mean “horn.” And so when the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Vulgate version in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Jerome, this word was translated “horn” from the Latin. Now the Vulgate was the only version of Scripture allowed in the Roman church for many centuries (well up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in fact). Therefore, the great Italian sculptor, Michaelangelo, created a wonderful statue in

St. Basilica of Moses with white horns on his head. “Though this great work of the master’s art was thus created from a translation error, it could be said that it is far easier to sculpt horns than shining in any case” ([link here](#)).

I find it interesting that while what is written on the tablets is important, what receives special attention is the shining appearance of Moses’ face after his time with God. What is clear is that something major happened to Moses as he came down from the mountain wearing the “residue of the holy which spelled danger” (Brueggemann) and made the Israelites, including his own brother, afraid to approach him. But Moses tells them to come closer. First Aaron and the other leaders come towards him and when the others see that no one has died from Moses’ glow, they also move closer. You see it was known that anyone who saw God face-to-face would not live to tell about it. But Moses told them everything the Lord had told him on the mountain (vv.31-32). They might not be able to see God directly, but they could see God’s glory reflected in Moses. So what’s with the veil then?! No one really knows- though there is lots of speculation. It seems that Moses takes off the veil when he speaks with God and/or is delivering a message from God to the people but then he puts on the veil. Maybe it is to protect the others from Moses’ radiating face? But we see here that they aren’t hurt. Regardless of the purpose, Paul pushes this notion of a veil in his letter to the Corinthians.

Like Moses, Jesus is also transfigured in a dazzling, bright light on a mountain in the company of both Moses and Elijah and three of his disciples, but Jesus' face doesn't continue to glow when he comes down the mountain. "Jesus becomes the pivot where holiness touches humanity. And they were terrified" (Walter Brueggemann, Preaching book, Vol, 1). Paul argues that with Moses the response is to hide the fading glory, as the veil prevents people from seeing glory. "Unlike Moses' fleeting glory, encountering the transfigured and glorified Christ produces a growing glory- glory that becomes more and more like Christ (3:18)" (Carla Works, workingpreacher.org). Paul reminds us that the revelation of Jesus' glory is so spectacular that it initiates the transfiguration of all who are in Christ. They have- we have- at the core of our existence- an "implosion of God's holiness that reshapes and redefines everything" (Brueggemann). Here Paul claims that even the Corinthian church is being transformed to reflect God's glory. Given what we know about the Corinthians from Paul's letter, this is a wild claim. "Paul has faith- not in the church's abilities to change itself- but in the Spirit's work within it. Paul sees himself as one whose motives have been laid bare in the light of God's glory. So how could he do anything other than reflect the marvelous grace that God has granted him" (Works)? God's grace changes Paul, as he believes it is also changing the people of Corinth. Notice I didn't say they changed themselves. No, they were changed by the God whose glory transfigures everyone it touches. "It is a light that cannot be captured or controlled, any more than God can be. It can only be experienced and believed" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels*). Yes, what we are asked to believe is that

at certain breakthrough moments in time, the glory of God is certifiably visible. No, the Corinthians, like the Israelites, weren't perfect by any means, but Paul knows that God has not abandoned them because God is a God of second and third chances. "Whether veiled or unveiled, Moses' face is a sign of God's care and continual presence, that God's grace prevailed, even in the midst of Israel's sin" (Alphonetta Wines, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)).

When have you seen the transfigured Lord in all his glory? How is God's Spirit transforming you? How is your face shining Christ's light for others? I read an email to the staff this week from a most impressive 15 year-old named Connor, with whom I've been writing occasional emails-initiated by him- and whose family makes and delivers the bagged lunches from their church as well as pop top bags and hygiene kits that he and his family buy and make for our parishioners. Connor and his family have become so involved in serving people experiencing homelessness at Triune and beyond that they decided to start a new nonprofit called "Bright Lights Greenville" ([link here](#)). Upon Connor's insistence, he and his siblings applied for and won a Global Youth Mobilization grant which has helped them to further their mission of sharing Christ's light with those experiencing homelessness. Can't you just see Connor and his siblings' faces shining as they pour love into each pop top bag and hygiene kit they make?! How are you reflecting God's glory and reflecting the light of Christ to others?

Many of us may feel, like Moses, that we only see glimpses of God's glory. And some of us may ask how do you have hope, you odd followers of Jesus? These fleeting glimpses of God's glory offer us hope as we wait upon Jesus' return. When death and war will be no more. As Paul says that is why we have hope and why we don't need to lose heart. In the midst of life as we know it, God's mercy is at work. We're being transformed by God's Spirit from one degree of glory to the next. This transformation happens when we "live close enough to God and are attentive enough to God that the presence of God over time, through time, in time changes us, heals us, and makes us more like God's self" (Brueggemann). Our challenge is that "we are endlessly seduced by imagining the glory is to be found in our technology, in our brightness, in our achievement, in our power, in our wealth, in our loveliness, in our next hit or high or in our fitness- NO! The glory is to be found in the face and body and life and story of the One who suffers in and with and for the world" (Brueggemann)! Stories of transformative holiness- of transfiguration- are hard to explain and beyond our understanding. Yet we do get glimpses of God's glory...many times in people and many times in art or nature and by God's Spirit, we're transformed.

John Legend and Common's voices come to mind in the movie *Selma* in the song, *Glory*. If you get a chance, please listen to it. It is powerful. Legend starts out, "One day when the glory comes, it will be ours. One day when the war is won, we will be sure. Oh, glory!" Then the words are rapped by Common, "Hands to the Heavens, no man, no weapon formed against, yes glory is destined..Justice for all just ain't specific

enough- one son died, his spirit is revisitin' us..." Legend continues, "Oh, glory. Now the war is not over; victory isn't won, but we'll fight on to the finish until it's all done, and we'll cry glory, oh, glory!" Then the words are rapped, "Even Jesus got his crown in front of a crowd... From dark roads he rose, to become a hero facin' the league of justice, his power was the people; Welcome to the story we call victory: the coming of the Lord: my eyes have seen the glory" ([lyrics here](#))! And so we don't lose hope. We do not lose heart! God does not quit until in innocence we may all say, "Free at last, free at last!" God will not quit until our life is reflective of God's own life. "No matter how dismal, not matter how scary or unpromising the times, this story of ancient Israel is a reminder to us all, even when there is much work to do, in the words of the spiritual, 'Hold on just a little while longer, everything is gonna be alright'" (Wines). Until then as God continues to shine God's light on us with the power to transfigure the darkest of our days...may we all live in hope reflecting not our things but the One who transforms us, showing us mercy upon mercy. Shine on, people of God, shine on! Amen.