

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony 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. (Exodus 34:29-35)

Why Hide Glory?

When I was in high school, I heard a story about MLS, the school I was attending. According to the story, there was a man who faithfully attended one of our churches in Saginaw. His last name was Fox. He was clearly very poor. One winter day, one of the teachers at MLS was driving somewhere and he saw Mr. Fox walking in his thin coat, and so that teacher stopped and gave him a lift. As they were riding along, they passed the campus of the high school and a house nearby that was for sale. Mr. Fox asked the teacher if he should buy that house for MLS so they could use it as a teacherage. The teacher laughed and said that the school didn't really need it. Well, not long after that, Mr. Fox died. And it turned out that he was a very wealthy man and he left a considerable amount of money to MLS. And he would have bought that house for the school, if that teacher had not laughed the whole thing off.

My point this morning is not the loss of the house, but rather the way that Mr. Fox chose to live his life. Even if some of the details of that story were corrupted before I heard them, I'm pretty sure there really was a Mr. Fox, he really was wealthy and he really did live as though he wasn't. Why would a man choose to live that way? Personally, I can't imagine walking around in Saginaw in the winter if I could afford to buy a car. But it goes beyond personal comfort. Why would a person choose to let people dismiss them as a poor, unsuccessful nobody when they really had more money than most of us do? I never met Mr. Fox, so I can't tell you. But it seems strange that someone would hide something that would give them that kind of respect – that kind of glory. That's the connection to our Old Testament lesson for today. Moses hides glory. Why does he do that? **Why hide glory?**

I.

Now, the glory that Moses hid is a little unusual. The people were at Mt. Sinai. God himself had descended on the mountain in a cloud of fire and smoke. He summoned Moses to come up and speak with him. We all know that God gave him the Ten Commandments carved on two tablets of stone. But did you realize that the people camped there before the mountain for almost a year? Moses would sometimes be gone for weeks at a time. In fact, the first time he went up the mountain, he was gone so long that the people made an idol, the golden calf, to explain all that was happening. When Moses saw that, he got so mad that he threw down those two stone tablets that God himself had given him and they shattered. Moses had to make two new tablets and take them back up to God to get the commandments again.

Moses was bringing that second set of tablets down the mountain in the beginning of our text and his face was radiant. The glory that Moses hid was not a great reputation. It wasn't the kind of glory that comes from being a war hero or a great athlete or a successful businessman. Moses' glory was an actual physical light that shone from his face.

Moses didn't even know it was there. But how did the people respond? They were afraid to come near him. Even his brother Aaron, the first high priest, was afraid to come near him. Moses had to call them and tell that it was OK before they would approach him. To make them less uneasy, Moses put on a veil that hid the glory. And this wasn't a one time thing. Whenever Moses spoke to God, he took off the veil. But when he came out to speak to the people, they would see that his face was radiant again. After telling them what God had said, he would put the veil back on, so that they didn't have to see it.

Why did his face shine like this? Because he had been speaking with God. So does that mean that God's glory naturally "rubs off" on people who see it? Not really. At least, no passage of the Bible says that. Rather, this was something God did on purpose. Notice, when Moses was giving the people the messages that God had given him, he made them look at the glory in his face. He only put on the veil when the announcement was done. So when they were socializing, when he got together with the people for meetings or meals, he hid the glory. But when he gave them the word of the Lord, he showed that glory so that they could see without question where his message came from.

What was his message? The law. At Mt. Sinai, God established the rules that would govern his Old Testament people for the next 1500 years. That's why in our epistle lesson for today, St. Paul connects the radiance from Moses' face with the Old Covenant, the Mt. Sinai rules, a covenant that was temporary and fading away. He points us to a greater glory, a glory that we see in our gospel lesson for today, the glory of Christ, the glory of God's love in saving us. But did you notice that Peter, James and John had the same reaction to Jesus' glory that Aaron and the people of Israel had to Moses' glory? They were afraid. The glory of the Lord struck fear into their hearts. Why? Because they were all sinners. And you know what? We would react the same way. I think it's easy for us to read these stories and imagine ourselves doing better than Aaron or Peter did. And maybe we wouldn't have suggested to Jesus that we camp out on the mountain with Moses and Elijah because it was just so cool to have that foretaste of heaven. But we would probably do and say something equally as dumb, because that's what fear does to us, right? It makes us run away. It makes us say and do stupid things. It paralyzes us.

And fear is the natural reaction of a sinner to the holy God who can and will judge all the earth. When Jesus comes back, he says that the nations of the earth will mourn. The world will be terrified because he will come in all his glory to judge the living and the dead. And even before Jesus actually announces what each person's verdict we'll be, they will know. At the moment that they see Jesus they will know in their hearts that they're guilty. Even we will know that. But the difference for us will be that we will also know what Jesus did to take away that fear. We will know that he paid for our sins.

But to do that, he had to come to us. Moses put on the veil out of consideration for the weakness and fear of his people. He put on the veil so that children wouldn't cry when they saw him and people wouldn't drop and break whatever they were carrying or say dumb things because their brains were addled with fear. It was the only way that he could still approach his people. And God did the same thing for us. Jesus is the true Son of God. At his Transfiguration, he revealed his glory. Luke says, "**The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.**" My friends, that's Jesus' natural appearance. He doesn't reflect glory temporarily like Moses did. He constantly shines with the glory of God.

But that's not how he appeared in Bethlehem. The angels had to tell the shepherds that that baby in the manger was more than just a human child. As Jesus grew up, as he spent three years preaching and teaching, he hid his glory most of the time. He did that so that he could draw near to us. You see, our problem is that we are sinners. Our sin corrupts all that we are. We are born that way and we'll die that way. And we show it, over and over again. Every time we're too selfish to get up and help a family member with some unpleasant task, every time we put ourselves ahead of our spouse or our children or our parents, we show that in our hearts, we love ourselves first of all. We're idol worshippers and sinners and we deserve God's punishment in hell forever. No one like that could ever approach God. No one like that could ever get past their terror of his glory. Certainly, no one like that could ever do enough good to balance the scales or to so thoroughly change that we deserve a second chance. If God came to us in all his glory, we'd fall all over ourselves in terror.

So Jesus put on a veil. He covered himself with human flesh. Then he humbled himself to be born in stable and live in a sinful world as if he were one more broken and limited sinner. He did all that so that he could stand in our place and pay for our sin on the cross, and then rise to tell us we are forgiven. He did that so that when we see him, we won't be terrified. When we die or he returns – whichever comes first – he's going to strip away our sinful nature and all that will be left is the new and holy believer that he gave us when we were baptized. Rather than fear, we will rejoice to be in his presence. That joy will last forever. So **why hide glory? So God can draw near to us.**

II.

Our fear finally disappears only in heaven. For now, we're stuck down here in this broken world. Just how real that is was illustrated to me last week while I was on vacation for a couple of days. My phone started

blowing up with texts. One of our elderly members broke her pelvis and went to the hospital. One of our snowbirds had emergency surgery down in Florida and for a day or two, it looked like she wasn't going to make it. A member in her 20's had a medical emergency and was diagnosed with epilepsy. Another one had to make plans for surgery. That was only the medical stuff. It was kind of a lot for one week, but it illustrates the reality of life here. Pain and hardship come because sin rules here, the same sin that makes us terrified of God's presence.

Jesus conquered that sin. We will be set free from all it does to us. But we're not there yet. Neither were the people that Moses led. They were still on the way to the Promised Land. But even reaching the Promised Land was not the sum total of what God was doing for them. He didn't choose them only for this life. God always planned for heaven and for the resurrection and for the new heavens and the new earth. Moses' job was minister to God's people as they stumbled through this life, so that God could keep their faith alive.

God hid his glory in the ministry of Moses. God hid his glory in sacrifices and purity laws and a priesthood which all foreshadowed the coming of Christ who would take away the people's sins. God hid his glory in the New Testament ministry that Jesus himself established and in the word and sacraments he gave us to create and sustain faith. God continues to hide his glory in the community of believers that he has assembled here at Peace and in the Holy Christian Church, which is all believers on this earth and even in heaven. For us down here, that glory is impossible to see. When people we love are sick and dying, when God allows challenges to shake our lives, when all the fears of life strike us, we can't see the glory that God has promised us.

But all those things are the result of sin and what it does to this world. Jesus conquered sin when he died and rose. Jesus conquered the sin in our hearts when he reached out to us through the gospel and gave us faith. Jesus promises to sustain our faith by that gospel every day that we are challenged here. And he promises that when the time is right, he will take us home to heaven. Already there, all pain and sorrow will be over. We will live with him in glory. Then he will return. He will make this world new. He will end all sin and all sorrow and all hurt. Death itself will die. And we will live in God's presence, in the glory that belongs to the children of our heavenly Father, forever. But for us to reach that glory, Jesus has to hide himself in that word and sacrament and in the church and her ministry, so that we come to faith and so that our faith lives on. He loves us enough to hide it. **Why hide glory? So God can give us true glory.**

There could be any number of reasons why Mr. Fox hid his wealth and didn't adopt the kind of lifestyle that people in our society would envy and talk about. Maybe he was just too humble of a Christian to be comfortable with that. Whatever his reasons were, the Son of God hid his glory because he loves us. Trust in his love and live forever. Amen.