

"Transfigured: Shining as Christ"

Ex. 34:29-35;
Luke 9:28-36

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(Periodically, when I look at my computer screen too long and my eyes become tired and strained, a bright, white light begins to dance across my field of vision. Sometimes that bright white light will remain in my field of vision for minutes, even hours dancing across the interior of my eyes in a left to right fashion.

Frankly, the light scares and annoys me a little bit. I begin to wonder, "What is going on? Is there something wrong with my eyes? Are my eyes deteriorating and my vision failing?" I also find that I cannot focus on the words on the screen in front of me. The very words I want to read are blocked out of view by the blinding white light.)

The disciples experienced some confusion and fear when they went up the mountain with Jesus to pray. Most likely it was night. Sleepy-eyed, they looked up and saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Then, Jesus stood alone, his face shining brightly, his clothes dazzling white. What were they to make of this?

GOD MADE JESUS SHINE. JESUS HAD GONE UP TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP TO PRAY AND TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. HE WAS JOINED BY MOSES AND ELIJAH AND THEY TALKED ABOUT JESUS' DESTINY IN JERUSALEM, WHERE HE WOULD FULFILL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS IN THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION. A CLOUD COMES OVER THE MOUNTAIN. SUDDENLY, JESUS IS STANDING ALONE, HIS FACE SHINING WITH THE GLORY OF GOD, HIS CLOTHES DAZZLING WHITE.

Moses had gone up Mount Sinai and had received God's covenant with the people, the Ten Commandments. When he came down the mountain to talk with the people, his face was shining so brightly with God's radiance that he had to wear a veil or a mask.

God gave the disciples, you and me a gift. God gives us the gift of seeing Jesus as God sees Jesus. Jesus shines. Jesus shines with God's glory. We get a peek of Jesus ahead of time of Jesus being glorified upon the cross and rising from the grave. This is a pre-Jerusalem, pre-death and resurrection glimpse. Jesus is the final and ultimate fulfillment of the prophet's longing for a Messiah and Savior.

(Scientifically, there are probably some medical experts who try to explain away the phenomenon, an almost universal one, in near-death experiences. I have never had this experience, but it is reported almost universally by people who die and then are brought back to life. Many of them report that they are not afraid. In fact, the opposite. They feel safe, warm, cared for. Some are disembodied and able to look down at themselves, dispassionately,

on the operating table. Many, approaching death and life on the other side, see themselves going through a long tunnel with a bright light, at the end of the tunnel, beckoning them forward. I wonder, could that bright and dazzling light be Jesus, the Son of God? I don't know.)

Peter, James, and John go to the mountain top to pray and there they experience the dazzling glory of Christ.

GOD MADE JESUS SHINE. GOD MADE US TO SHINE, TOO. BUT WE LOSE THAT RADIANCE WHEN WE FAIL TO GO TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP AND TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE IN PRAYER, WORSHIP AND PRAISE. JESUS OPENS THE SLEEPY EYES OF HIS DISCIPLES AS THEY SEE THAT HE IS LINKED WITH THE LAW (MOSES) AND THE PROPHETS (ELIJAH) BUT IS GREATER THAN EITHER OF THEM. WAS IT LUTHER WHO SAID THAT WE ARE LITTLE CHRISTS?

Jesus took the disciples with him up the mountain to pray. This was early in Jesus' ministry and he was seeking God's counsel as he struggled with whether or not to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die on a cross and to be raised from the dead after three days. Jesus conversed with Moses and Elijah about what was to happen in Jerusalem. The cloud came in. They left. And Jesus came out of that experience, radiant and glowing and basking in the light of God's love!

Now, wouldn't you know it? Peter is a lot like us. He wanted to stay up on that mountain and bask in the glow of the mountain top experience. He wanted to build three shrines: one to Moses, one to Elijah, and one to Jesus. He wanted to bottle the experience. But, he also did not get it. Jesus shone greater than Moses or Elijah. And Jesus was not about to stay on the mountain but to go back down into the valley of suffering to be an instrument of God's healing and peace. A voice cries from the cloud over the mountain, "*This is my Beloved, my Son. Listen to him!*" (We are a lot like Peter. God makes us shine, but dull the shine. We misunderstand. We misuse the gift of radiance.

"Over the years . . . our luminosity tends to fade. Every inhospitable word spoken, every neighbor mistreated and every resource hoarded layers grime over our radiance. Every hand unextended, every gift squandered and every road not taken leaves layers of apathetic dust. The world tells us that the radiant things out there are things we purchase. 'When you wear the shiny stone or drive the shiny car, you will shine.' Too often we cede out light to the glossy [things] of the world and forget that we are the ones God made to shine."

p. 18, "Living by the Word", *Christian Century*, February 9, 2010.

Rabbi Albert Lewis, who is dying and asks Mitch Albom to say his eulogy at his funeral, has sage advice.

"Mitch, it does no good to be angry or carry grudges." He made a fist. "It churns you up inside. It does you more harm than the object of your anger." So let it go? I asked. "Or don't let it get started in the first place," he said. "You know what I found over the years? When I had a disagreement with someone, and they came to talk to me, I always began by saying, 'I've thought about it. And in some ways maybe you're right.'" "Now, I didn't always believe that. But it made things easier. Right from the start they relaxed. A negotiation could take place. I took a volatile situation and, what's the word . . .?" Defused it? "Defused it. We need to do that. Especially with family. "you know, in our tradition, we ask forgiveness from everyone – even casual acquaintances. But with those we are closest with – wives, children, parents – we too often let things linger. Don't wait, Mitch. It's such a waste." He told me a story. A man buried his wife. At the gravesite he stood by the Reb, tears falling down his face. "I loved her," he whispered. The Reb nodded. "I mean . . . I really loved her." The man broke down. "And . . . I almost told her once." The Reb looked at me sadly. "Nothing haunts like the things we don't say."

pp.211-212, Mitch Albom, *Have a Little Faith*, Hyperion, New York, 2009.

God made Jesus shine. God made us to shine, too.

GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON US. GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN US. DESPITE OUR TARNISHED IMAGE, GOD SCRUBS US UP SO THAT WE MAY SHINE WITH THE RADIANT GLOW OF GOD'S LOVE. GOD SEES US AS SHINING IN GOD'S GLORY. EVEN AS WE WERE GIVEN THE GIFT TO SEE JESUS, GLORIOUS AND RADIANT, WE ARE GIVEN THE GIFT TO SEE OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US. WE ARE GIVEN THE GRACE TO BE GOD'S SHINING STARS.

So how do we recover that radiance. How do we glow and shine as Jesus shines? We bask in the presence of God on the mountain top, and then, we go down to the valley where there is pain and suffering that needs healing. Jesus and his disciples did not stay on the mountain. They went down to the valley and into the cities. The very first thing Jesus and the disciples were confronted with was a man who begged them to heal his demon-possessed son.

It has not escaped me that today is Everybody's Birthday Party and Valentine's Day. Are there any radiant people you know who are luminous with love? Do you know anyone who just walks in the room and radiates love and joy and peace? You and I are blessed to know in our church, family and community people who just shine and bring God's love to bear on any situation.

(Julie and I had sent our five grandchildren Valentine's cards, bags of peanut M&M's, and suitable gifts. Our South Dakota grandchildren, Anders and Annika, called us on their mother's cell phone Wednesday evening as they were going with her to do grocery shopping at Safeway. They called to say

thank you. We could tell they were tickled pink with the tokens of our affection, Anders with his Tony Hawk T-shirt, Annika with her earrings and lip gloss. Julie's and my conversation with them lapsed into the coded language of love between us. Annika made the growling noise of an animal into the receiver. I growled back. Anders chortled, "Hey, big Bubba." I said, "Hey, Anders. How's my little Bubba?" The telephone call, interrupted by shopping in Safeway, easily lasted thirty or forty-five minutes. The wide-ranging conversation was filled with affection and love. Anders and Annika love their grandparents. Their grandparents love them too.)

It is God's intention that the accretion of dirt and grime be wiped away that we shine with the light and the radiance of God's love.

In worship, prayer and praise we have been to the mountain today. There we have seen Jesus, glowing with God's love. There we have seen the possibility of our glowing with God's love. We'd like to stay on the mountain and bottle that experience.

But, let us come down from the mountain as we leave worship today. Let us go back into the valley and the cities where there is pain and suffering. And let us shine as Jesus' ambassadors dispensing God's radiant gifts of hope, healing, love and justice. So be it. Amen.