

Knowing God: Moses and Jesus' Transfiguration

Transfiguration Sunday - March 2019

Exodus 34:29-35

29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34 but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. 4:1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Luke 9:28-36

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Introduction

Lectionary selection is very strong this week.

The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel line up and build.

Let's trace what they bring.

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses had been up the mountain again to meet God.

- When he came back he glowed – his facial skin shone with glory. He was irradiated.
 - Today people might suspect a moisturizer or cosmetic wonder product?
- This holy facial shine made people afraid, even his own brother. cf v 34.

It seems many people are spooked by the reality of God coming close. The anxiety can be coped with by putting things in place that don't require the reality of God. It may even involve a God-lite religion focused on poetic words, prayers, rituals and candles etc along with faith-based folk festivals. Talking about religions and various ethical positions might be OK but actually engaging the reality of God might be a bit intimidating so best not go there.

Moses was shining because of his meeting with God but at the same time he was carrying two stone tablets of notes he had taken while in conversation with God. He encouraged the people to receive these words and take them to heart as commands from the Lord God.

The drama of this story was not the stone tablets and what was written on them. The drama was Moses' glowing in a way that unnerved people.

Here we meet the problem:

Prophets like Moses are those who seek direct encounter with God which is precisely what most people are afraid of.

A First Solution to God's disturbing glory here is a veil for Moses.

A veil allows for indirectness and distance.

It's like a lampshade to dim the brightness and glare.

A Second supporting solution that followed over time was to focus on the words on the tablets over the reality of God meeting Moses. Those two tablets were subsequently made to be very, very important as the *Torah* or 'Law', even more important than God!

God is can be made so distant and so obscured without being denied. Over time this emphasis on the things of God over God's interpersonal reality breeds management and administration so complicated that the veil is no longer really necessary. Religion can do this.

Does this sound familiar in any way?

As the actual manifest glory of God is a problem to many people we may invent 'religion' where we are not confronted by anything beyond or bigger than ourselves.

Yet, and yet, some of us still seek God in his majestic and awesome glory. Like moths drawn to the flame some still seek the reality of God in personal encounter.

Illustration

A human Illustration is perhaps eye-contact where the eye is the window to the soul.

Some seek it, others avoid it.

In this situation the veil provides insulation while people are together, sort of?

Sunglasses can be a form of veil to hide behind and remain invisible or cut off as the personal level.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Paul relates to this account of Moses and the Jewish people.

- They talked about things they could not see.
 - ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;
- He saw them as having a veil over their vision preventing them from seeing God in Christ despite hearing the words Moses heard from God.
- Paul laments this

But there is good news and cause for hope:

¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom

Jesus brings light and lifts the veils of ignorance and deception bot willful and accidental. When we turn to Jesus the Spirit of God shines through.

A First Reflection:

God is real and his glory reveals his reality in ways that amaze and impact us to our core.

God up close can be frightening, yet many of us are still drawn.

Light can be like that too. We want it but it may be too bright and too revealing for us to handle.

Luke 9:28-36 Now back to a mountain:

Somewhere up a mountain, Peter, James and John saw the glory of Jesus as he really was. A veil was lifted from their eyes as they saw him with Elijah and Moses.

While Jesus prayed and entered the presence of God he began to glow, even his clothes dazzled. Peter, James and John were not afraid of this. They may have built enough trust and love of Jesus to handle this.

Perhaps Peter was too relaxed about this as he put his size 12 sandals into it in an attempt to save the moment or at least push the pause button to savour the moment.

³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.

Then we read:

³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

Peter went from seeing an opportunity to being terrified.

Q: What happened to cause this?

A: God arrived.

The glory of Jesus with Moses and Elijah was something he could handle and happily live with but the personal presence of God was something else and absolutely terrifying! This was so real he was shattered.

³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Where you go after holy terror I don’t know but that’s where Peter, James and John needed to be. It seemed to end as suddenly as it had begun, perhaps lasting a few seconds as if time could be measured?

³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

These are stories about people meeting God in ways so real that everything changed for them. We could add the account of Paul on the Damascus Road meeting the risen Lord.

Here’s my point: When the reality of God is encountered, everything changes. We need this.

Testimony:

As shared previously over the years,

At age 17, on a Friday evening, in the language of the day. I was ‘zapped’ by the power of God.

God's presence came over me with such impact that I was knocked over and flooded with light and inner presence I can only relate to electricity.

In those days people referred to this as being 'baptized in the Holy Spirit'.

This was my first ever encounter with the reality of God in a time and manner of his choosing. I was not terrified but I was changed. For the first time ever, God was undeniably real and I knew it. I had been moved from considering the things of God to considering the reality of God. There is a world of difference.

A Second Reflection

There is a Hebrew idiom that relates to this: יָדָע / 'Yada`

- In English it's translated as 'knowing'.
- In the recently produced English Standard Version we first hear it in - (Genesis 4.1):

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain ...

The Hebrew model for knowing involves engagement or some mode of personal intercourse. This is how we get to know an other. This applies to knowing God. You have to tangle with God Almighty to know him. Once you have been touched by God you may speak of knowing God – at least in part.

Anything that does not involve touching or being touched in some way is not true knowledge of another. Objectivity does not provide *yada*-knowledge. You have to get in close to *yada*-know.

This *yada*-knowledge of God was the dream of Israel's Prophets

Habakkuk 2:14

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

That is what it takes to save the world – oceans full of the *yada*-knowledge of God.

Jeremiah 31:31,34.

³¹ "Look, the time is coming," says the Lord,
"when I will make a new agreement.

³⁴ People will no longer have to teach their neighbors and relatives
to know the Lord.

This is because all people will know me,
from the least to the most important," says the Lord.

There is a health warning to knowing God. Think of the hot coffee warning on a McD's coffee. God is very hot, the closer he is the hotter it gets.

Moses glowed after meeting God so a veil was applied to overcome the collective anxiety of the people.

The manifest presence of the reality of God instantly terrified Peter, James and John into years of silence.

At age 17 I was so impacted by the presence of God I could not stand and it redirected my life.

Application:

- Knowing God can only be through personal encounter.
 - It can be awesomely awful.
 - Fearsomely terrifying - as Isaiah said: “Woe is me I am a man of unclean lips!”
- Only God can make himself known to us.
 - It must be primary - God has children but not grandchildren.
 - Reading God’s words alone does not do it, something more must happen.
 - Talking about, even preaching about it is not enough - but can help.
 - *Yada*-knowing involves person connection
- What we can do is let go of the veils and stop our attempts to hide

On 27 January we had a baptism service here.

God’s power was here, I felt it like electricity and a mil weight of presence.

While I was praying with people before their baptism there were words I spoke over people which came with instant shots of power through the arm and hand I had laid on them. I knew what that was. It is even to be seen in the video if you know what to look for.

Earlier today we sang John Wimber’s song: More love, more power which I relate to this. I want more of the reality of God for myself and for you all.

The knowledge of God at this level in this way transforms people however it is experienced. St Paul could never forget being knocked to the ground. Peter, James and John could never forget being terrified in the cloud.

I have never forgotten being overwhelmed by the presence and power of God as if flooded with power and light. I may still not understand it all but I can never forget it.

Conclusion:

Let’s get practical.

None of us can bring people into *yada*-knowledge of God.

God does that as God chooses to.

I can perhaps move people to desire to want to *yada*-know God but the Holy Spirit does it.

I am trying to say there is more.

- I want to see veils dropped.
- I want to pray for God’s patient and faithful perseverance to break out in personal revelation that brings *yada*-knowledge.

BUT understand, once God breaks into our lives, it’s forever changed.

Let’s pray: