

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MARCH 3, 2019

Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 99

The Lord is enthroned above all, exalted above the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name.

Holy is God, lover of justice, full of righteousness.

Extol the Lord our God and bow before the mystery.

**O Lord our God, you answer those who call,
forgiving them in your holiness.**

The Scripture

Exodus 34:29-35

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. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward, all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 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, 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.

The Message

The Veil Over His Face

Terry Overfelt

Big Love: God is longing for relationship with us that will leave us glowing in sacred presence.

Radiance

I was delighted to be the celebrant for our daughter Hannah's marriage to Clint Muzzy. One of the first things the dressmaker asked Hannah before embarking on the dress choosing was, "Imagine yourself ready to enter into the church. It is your wedding day. The doors to the sanctuary open and you walk in. Describe how you feel."

By the imaginings of Hannah's feelings in that moment, the designer had a surprisingly good idea of what sort of dress Hannah was dreaming of. As is often the case, when she at last tried on the dress that was just right, she knew it.

What I didn't realize in my prayers and imaginings of this actual moment of Hannah's entry was how radiant she was. In meeting and retreating with the two of them for hours over the months of engagement, we created the ceremony from welcome to pronouncement. I thought I had prepared my heart and prayed my joy and practiced my composure. However, seeing her was about to undo me. Walking in on the arm of her Dad, she glowed.

The moment was a surprising flash back to what she had described eight months prior. So, I looked away, to Clint's face. Well, that wasn't going to help. He was glowing, too. So, I panic-prayed the, "Oh God," took a slow, deep breath and rested in the beauty of their moment- feeling the shift when your head drops down into your heart. It is release and receiving.

Veils

Sometimes brides wear veils. In today's Scripture, radiant Moses is wearing a veil. He comes off the mountain not knowing he is outwardly glowing. No mirror check on the way down. He's been up on the mountain for 40 days and nights. He has been in the presence of the Great I AM. There was conversation, listening, and chipping away! They had covenant talk, sacred promise hewn in stone! He chiseled the law, Ten Commandments to be taken down as vows to the waiting people.

Commandments

At that time, the Hebrew laws numbered 613. Three-hundred-sixty-five of them were negative commandments, to abstain from certain acts. This number corresponded with the number of days in the solar year.

A **shall not** a day...keeps the devil away. Two-hundred-forty-eight was the number of the positive commandments – a number correlating with the number of bones and main organs in the human body.

In 40-days, God and Moses pared them down to ten; all on two stone tablets. Moses was ecstatic. Simpler laws could be remembered and abided. Some translations say there were rays coming off his face! Radiant!

Radiance

Yet it is not the commandments themselves that are the focus in today's Word. It is the radiance of Moses' face. When his brother Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses, face shining, they were afraid. When Moses called to them, they came and heard the commandments and all that the Lord had spoken on Mount Sinai.

Have you been with someone who was so excited to tell you something that their face was glowing? Transformed? Transfigured!?

After they finished speaking, Moses put a veil on his face. He was a bit overpowering. It is hard to enter in with someone who is over the moon, glowing, and even harder to stay for too long, especially if we can't relate. "Moses, you are too much!"

And it is exhausting yourself to maintain this kind of vibrancy.

So, about the veil: Was this so everyone around him could sleep? "Moses, turn off the light!" Was this because he didn't want to distract them from their own enlightenment, as they pondered the new short hand commands and how every single other law fell categorically into one of these ten commandments? Or was the veil because Moses felt the presence fading with the passing hours away from God and did not want them to see? Was he mourning the sacred diminishing himself?

Appearances Are Important

Whatever the impetus, when moving back up the mountain, Moses would take off the veil, as he went in before the Lord. Presence of God? Veil off. Before the people? Veil on.

Before God, we are all unveiled. God, who intimately knows our hearts, hopes, strivings, strengths, and shortcomings and loves us because of them, needs no veiling pretense from us. And isn't that refreshingly affirming and honest?

Why the Veil?

If by grace, we take on that glow and holiness, and people take notice, we would certainly think it important to keep up the appearance of holiness lest in our weaker moment, we would cause someone to stumble by the poor example of our human failings. That veil could suffocate you.

In our weaker moments, we might want to adopt the veil not only as a cover over but even a shroud in our disappointment or rage for the ache of loss and closeness. Mourners have worn this veil.

Maybe Moses puts the veil back on, because of the contrast of having been in the presence of holy God and then returning to the false trappings of a discouraged and desperate people, who have melted their wealth to make an idol of a golden calf. Disappointment would cause us to cover our face

In the hours of his separation and honest disappointment, maybe Moses feels the touch of God going dim. He covers his face for his own doubt and shame that he has

not yet led them to the promised land. The veil could be a mask for despair or for hiding, or for the wiping of tears

God wants the veil off. God wants us to radiate real, authentic, messy, overwhelming, overpowering, self. In this honesty and vulnerability God both delights and works in us. Isaiah 30:18: "Therefore, the Lord waits to be gracious to you."

Retreating with God is revealing and unveiling.

Re-entry

Ruth Haley Barton asks us to prepare ourselves for reentry from the moments with the sacred retreat, be it four- minutes, 40-minutes, 40-days, or 40-years with these four prompts:

1. Remind yourself of what God has said that seems to be clear.
2. What signs have been given you to remember what was said and real, even in the thick of life?
3. Who or what waits for you? What gifts has God given you to share with others?
4. How can you be wise and protective of your tender self and sensitive to others?

Signs

During the beginning of our three-hours of silence last week at the Women's Retreat, a sink hole opened in the parking lot. Some cars sank to the level of buried tires. Just as I was settling into the most vulnerable, honest place of silence, I could hear the backup beeping of the tow truck.

I was summoned to come and help, stand, be responsible to and with these victims and my response was snarky. I apologized.

But like so many others, I was looking so forward to this time off the grid and now felt the pull of the chains. I walked the parking lot with the others trying to identify cars in jeopardy. The tow driver, Paul, was amazing, and though he had come to help the AAA member, he was staying until all were free and secure.

As we stood looking from the parking lot, over the pasture, the silence broken, conversations continued. One of my sisters began to disclose some important feelings and thoughts. We talked candidly and laughingly called this "pasturing." Just as we got to the point in the conversation of where to go next with these honest and challenging thoughts, a dark cloud overhead pelted us with about ten-seconds of downpour. We pulled our hoods over our heads. The grazing horses all immediately lifted their heads

in unison and began an earth-shaking stampede toward the stable. The sun broke into the moment.

My friend's eyes followed the horses south. Placing my hand on her shoulder, I said, "The answer to your wondering is here." She turned to face a glorious full rainbow, and then a double. What a gift! We gladly received, not the expectation of three-hours of silence, but the surprising gift of God's affirming covenant sign of love; a bow in the sky. Three-hours of silence could not have brought a more excellent trade.

Conclusion

Bride of Christ, God has a proposal for us. Moses went up the mountain; we come down the aisle. Moses was holding new commandments; we are renewing the covenant. Moses' face shone; we are glowing with promise. Moses had been listening to God; we can be listening **for** God.

It begins with Dearly Beloved...gather here today. You are being made new. I pronounce you!

Centering

Try this simple and beautiful centering practice called Palms Down, Palms Up. Make yourself comfortable yet attentive. Place your hands, palm down on your thighs. Take a deep breath in saying, "God in me." Exhale slowly saying simply, "Peace."

Begin by placing your palms down on your thighs, symbolic of your desire to turn over any concerns or bitterness you have to God. Inwardly you may think, "Lord, I give you MY..." Whatever it is that weights on your mind or is a concern to you, just say, "Palms down." Release it.

After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from God. "Lord, I would like to receive your divine love for this situation, your peace, your patience, your joy."

Whatever you need, you say, "Palms up." Receive.

Spend a time in complete silence. Do not ask for anything. Allow God to commune with your spirit, to love you.

If impressions or directions come, fine; if not, fine. Close each meditation with a genuine expression of thanksgiving.

Feel your head empty into your heart. While the musicians are coming into place, try the practice again.

Palms down; release. Palms up; receive.