

## **The Glory of God**

**Exodus 34:1-9, 40:34-38, Acts 2:1-13, 2 Cor 3:12-18**

**by Patty Friesen with help from Ellen Davis, Preaching, p. 38-39**

**and Molly Marshall, Weavings, p. 25-33 (June 4/17)**

Sing: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling # 592 HWB and keep hymnals handy for looking at hymns about glory.

When Moses came down the mountain that second time, bringing the remade tablets of the Law, his face was shining. This is one of the bible's unforgettable verbal snapshots: Moses coming down from Sinai, visibly aglow with the divine fire. Moses burned with the forty days and forty nights in the heat of God's presence. The people were afraid when they saw how he shone and with good reason. It was because of them and their sin that Moses had been called up the mountain a second time to write the Law as he heard it from God's own mouth. You remember what happened to the first tablets: Moses smashed them at the foot of the mountain; he smashed them in rage when he saw the golden calf that the people had made - shattered them in despair.

So the tablets were broken and the people were punished and God decided to try once more. Again God told Moses to carve tablets of stone and again called Moses up Sinai to hear the teaching given for Israel's sake. But this time Moses returned from that encounter visibly changed, his face radiant with God's electrifying holiness. No wonder the people shrank back in fear. Yet Moses called them to come to him; he sat and taught them all that he had heard in those forty days and nights on Sinai, when God spoke to Moses face to face.

It is this moment that Michelangelo captured in his massive marble portrait of Moses with horns of light sticking out of his head, as it says in Hebrew. Yet despite the horns, despite its size, Michelangelo's statue somehow is not daunting; it does not impose itself upon us but seems instead to await our attention. I think it is the fact that it is a seated figure: Moses does not tower over the people but sits almost at their level, waiting to instruct them.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word glory described the awesome grandeur, shining majesty and holiness of the divine presence. Only God is intrinsically glorious; humanity can only participate in glory because God shares it with us. The New Testament regularly speaks of Jesus sharing in the glory of God, particularly on the Mount of Transfiguration. Because we are joined to Jesus, we also participate in the glorious vocation of reflecting the splendor of God in earthen vessels. We are works in progress, to be sure; however, the collaborative work of transformation continues until we can see face to face the One whose likeness we share. This work requires a radical metamorphosis, which comes about through our contemplation of God's glory. Our lives are brought to completion through a shared life, by which the Holy Spirit burnishes us with a new brightness as at Pentecost.

Being changed by the glory of God is not a part of our modern day language in church. The hymns of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries regularly used images of glory – usually detailing the rewards the Christian would hope to gain in heaven. In that context, glory evoked crowns, mansions, golden streets and the like. Let's look at hymns #120 and #121, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Verse 3, Though the darkness hide thee, though the eye made blind by sin, they glory may not see, only though art holy. And

across the page to #121 the great German hymn Grosser Gott, wir loben dich, uplifting the holiness, splendor and glory of God. Beautiful hymns that emphasize the transcendence of God. But we also need an understanding of glory as it relates to the ongoing work of transformation by the Holy Spirit in human form here on earth.

Charles Wesley's hymn Love Divine, All Loves Excelling #592 more nearly captures the reciprocal movement between God and humans. In verse four, Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be. Changed from glory into glory, Til we reach our heavenly home. Wesley recognizes two things: first, we are not finished yet in the Christian life, no matter how old we are. Second, we must have the aid, the very breath of the Holy Spirit to help us be changed. Verse 2: Breathe O breathe, thy loving spirit. Spiritual transformation does not occur by our sheer effort alone but our lifelong spiritual disciplines of seeing the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Beholding the glory of God is more than simply seeing. It is a deeply attentive, faithful act that allows the beholder to perceive the presence of God in the ordinary life; in the beauty of creation around us, in our family members and in strangers. Beholding the glory of God is a lifelong vigilance to the signs of God all around us if we have eyes to see.

Like Moses, I'm going to spend 40 days and 40 nights in three national parks, Gros Morne, Newfoundland, Grasslands in southern Saskatchewan and Waterton in southern Alberta in a couple of weeks. I'm taking two weeks vacation with Patrick and then four weeks unpaid for time alone with God. After six years of ministry at the Mennonite Nursing Home and three years of ministry here in Osler, I need some quiet time with God in nature. It's been a wonderful and intense nine consecutive years of

ministry. In my work, there has been a lot of death of elders I've grown attached to and while I can sometimes keep a professional distance from that, I do feel there has been accumulative grief I need to tend to during my 40 days and nights. I need to listen to birds and hike with Patrick and journal about my dreams and feel the calm of God's Spirit soak into my soul.

While I'm gone, please don't build any golden calves! Terri Lynn will keep you all on the straight and narrow and is a capable leader and pastoral care provider. Julie Bergen is on deck for emergency pastoral care in homes and hospitals with Terri Lynn. Our deacons will be visiting the elderly. We will finally have some men in the pulpit this summer, beginning with George next week, Ryan Siemens, Conference Minister, Terry, Jake, Mark, Chris and Zachary. My first Sunday back, August 6, we will have a joint service with Aberdeen and Warman Mennonite at Meewasin Park down from Bethany Manor. We're looking forward to that. I'm thankful to the church for this opportunity for rest and transformation.

Transformation is a humble undertaking in which we also allow others to be formative agents in our lives. Tougher than being honest with ourselves before God is allowing others to lovingly hold up the mirror in a spiritual friendship, or women's or men's group or in spiritual direction or in Christian counseling or in Clinical Pastoral Education which is learning through visiting at St. Paul's hospital. CPE has been transformative for Julie, Lynette, Dave and I, and Terri Lynn will be in this program at St. Paul's this fall. These are powerful ways in which we allow others into our lives in trust and love that change our lives in a safe small group or one on one setting. In church

we hope to create more small groups and one-on-one visits where this transformation can happen.

Transformation happens also through the people we meet in service as we hear from young people who do service trips and from adults who volunteer with Mennonite Disaster Service or serve at Friendship Inn or volunteer in schools or on sports teams. We are changed by the unexpected; the children, elders and homeless people God sends into our lives.

Let us ask God to continue the transforming work of glory through the Holy Spirit in communion this morning. Let us pray. Gracious Spirit, dwell deeply with us, in scripture, song and fellowship with church, family and strangers. Do the transformative work you desire to do within us and help us grow in our capacity to love. Amen.