

Holy Glow

Rev. John Allen

When Moses met God atop Mount Sinai, scripture tells us that God's presence was so overwhelmingly awe-inspiring that Moses could not look directly at God. Instead, Moses crouched between two rocks and looked up after God had passed over him, glimpsing only the trailing edge of the divine glory.

This rich image from scripture is, I believe, meant to teach us an important lesson: that any efforts we make to contain God into something we could simply touch and see are foolish. That the fullness of God is so far beyond our human comprehension that even the greatest heroes of our faith like Moses, even when they climb to the top of the highest mountain to meet the almighty, still only get the most scant glimpse.

Think of the sun. No one of us could doubt that the sun sits there at the center of our Solar System. We feel the warmth of its rays. We

notice the difference between day and night. And sometimes we might even glance upwards and be able to make out something of its shape in the sky.

But we cannot really look at it, not more than a glimpse. And certainly no human will ever touch it, or stand on its scalding surface.

Remember the recent eclipse and all the elaborate devices we had to find and make in order to observe the shadow of the moon passing by the face of the sun, because even when it is partially obscured, you cannot look directly at the sun.

We know it is there, we can see the effects, we know how it feeds all life and lets us see creation.

But it is not something we can ever really fully see.

Of course God is 1,000 times more mysterious than that, but I think it is a helpful metaphor.

So Moses has this encounter with the Holy One, and then he walks down off the mountain, carrying the stone tablets upon which God has inscribed the 10 Commandments. And this is where our story today began, as he comes off the mountain people notice something different about him.

His face is glowing. Shining in fact.

It is such a strange and terrifying sight that the people avert their gaze, and once Moses realizes how his face has changed, he constructs a veil to hang in front of himself so that people can look at him without being overwhelmed.

So where does Moses' glow come from? It is reflection of God.

We might think of Moses as the moon, reflecting the overwhelming light of God in a more manageable way. Illuminating the darkness, but

with a light that can be beheld, can be looked upon, even by ordinary people.

The moon, mysterious still, but something we can stare at for hours, a place where humanity can, and has, set foot.

Moses is reflecting the holy glow of God for humanity, bringing the presence of God into the presence of the people in a way that they can touch, and hold, and see.

In a moment we will celebrate the sacrament of communion. This is for us a very similar type of moment. It is a great gift of Christ, this table, where we can handle the divine mystery in the form of ordinary things, where we can take into ourselves something that surpasses our ability to understand, here God meets us in bread and cup, God's very presence reflected in these everyday things, given for you and for me.

This seems to be a keen interest of God's. To make God's overwhelmingly mysterious, untouchable, unknowable awe-inspiring glory into things that we can touch, and taste, and see.

This is in fact what the incarnation of God in Jesus was all about. God came to walk in this world as one of us. God came to show us what God's love would look like when it was pressed into the limits of time and space.

In the life of Jesus, God showed us the everyday acts of love, and mercy, and wisdom, that would reflect God's love in our world. What the Holy Glow would look like in a human life, in a particular time and place.

Now, you do not have to be as great as Moses. And none of us will ever be as divine as Christ.

Nevertheless, we are called to reflect God's light in our living too. As Christians, we are meant to make our lives into signs of God's love

and presence, signs that might bring some light into the shadows, bring love to broken hearts, bring hope where hope is lost, healing where there is hurt, and forgiveness where anger festers.

Everything that we do together here at church is about trying to reflect a little bit of God's Holy Glow into the world. We try to do it in the things we do together, but most importantly, we are here to try to make each of our lives into living witnesses of God's love.

The reason that we teach the stories and practices of our faith to our children is in hope that they are so formed by God's presence that their lives bring God's love to the world, just by the way they live.

The reason we gather in worship and praise is to impart a bit of a glow upon each of our faces that we will carry with us as we leave this place to bring a bit of that holy glow to the world.

Several years ago, I met a homeless man in Washington DC who was talking about the emotional experience of asking for money from

strangers. He shared with me something I will never forget. He said, the hardest part is being ignored. Of having people who refuse to even acknowledge that I have asked them for help.

I have always felt so convicted by that statement. Because, I had many times before, and I have many times since, been so overwhelmed by the uncomfortable dissonance between my wealth and another's poverty, that I have been unable to look into their face, for fear that it will overwhelm me.

Perhaps you have felt that too, in the face of a desperate plea for help from someone on the subway, or sitting on the sidewalk, or walking between cars stopped at a red light.

Every fiber of your being wants to look down, look away, or cross the street.

I wonder if the reason we cannot bring ourselves to look into the face of our fellow humans who meet us in moments like that, is something

like why the Israelites could not look into Moses' face as he walked down from the mountain.

Because their face shines with the presence of God. Not the warm, kind, comforting presence, but the one that comes bearing stone tablets that make demands of us. The voice of God proclaiming that this is my beloved child too.

And we cannot look because we feel overwhelmed by the enormity of need, and our own utter inability to do anything of consequence to improve life for that person, in that moment.

So I try, and often fail, but I try each and every time I meet someone in a moment like that, whether I have something tangible to offer them or not, I try to reflect a glimmer of God's holy glow.

It is quite literally, quite literally, the least I can do. And I pray each day for the courage and the faith to do more.

When I get it right, which is probably less than half the time, I look up, and I acknowledge the person and what they have asked, even if I am saying no, I give them the basic courtesy of a response, and an apology, and I wish them well.

Because one simple thing that I believe in my heart is that God cares about them as much as God cares about me. That God loves them. That their lives matter and are important.

So I might say, "I don't have any cash, I'm sorry, good luck."

Quite literally the least I can do.

But my hope is that in that moment, just as their face shines like God's for me, a little of God's Holy Glow might be reflected in my face too.

That my caring, even enough to look up and speak, might offer just the smallest glimpse of the enormous amount of love that God has for them.

And the gift of that moment to me is to stand in the presence of God who breaks my heart yet again with the pain and injustice of the world, and pricks my spirit once more with the reminder of how intolerable it is to live in a world that tolerates poverty.

Creation is crammed full of the presence of God. Some of it is beautiful. We are all pretty adept at remembering God in the sunsets and rainbows.

Yet much of it is heartbreaking. Most of it is as routine as a loaf of bread and a cup of juice.

Our job is to tune our hearts so that we remain awake to the holiness that glows around us.

And to try to find the little ways each day that we can make our own lives into mirrors for that love, reflecting God's care, and God's hope, in every moment, in every place, in every way we can.

You won't be Moses.

You are not Jesus.

But you can be a sacrament. A living sign of the presence of God.

A glimpse of a holy glow.