

The Lessons Appointed for Use on  
the

Last Sunday after Epiphany  
Year C

**Exodus 34:29-35**

**Luke 9:28-36**

**Psalm 99**

The Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



**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 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 skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

## **Psalm 99**

Dominus regnavit

1 The Lord is King;  
let the people tremble;  
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;  
let the earth shake.

2 The Lord is great in Zion;  
he is high above all peoples.

3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome;  
he is the Holy One.

4 “O mighty King, lover of justice,  
you have established equity;  
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.”

5 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God  
and fall down before his footstool;  
he is the Holy One.

6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,  
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name,  
they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud;  
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.

8 O Lord our God, you answered them indeed;  
you were a God who forgave them,  
yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God  
and worship him upon his holy hill;

for the Lord our God is the Holy One.

**2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2**

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 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. 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. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 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**

About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 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. 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. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 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.

## SERMON

My friend, the irascible newspaper editorialist, David Peyton, was threatened throughout his school career with his “permanent record”. Any misbehavior, he was told, would be entered into his “permanent record”, which would then follow him throughout life, poisoning the well by advising all who came into contact with him what a disreputable sort he was. As an adult, his curiosity about his “permanent record” led him to return to his old school, the scene of his many crimes, and to demand to see it.

Turns out, there is no permanent record.

Thinking on that revelation prompted me to wonder how that fits into our understanding of our relationship with God? Do we not understand God to be busily about constructing our permanent record so that He can add it all up at judgment time and give us an appropri-

ate ultimate ticket? But what if there is no permanent record? What if the measure of our lives isn't the errors of our past, but the promise of our future? Put another way, why do we so intensely believe in a permanent record so that it is the past which determines our future? And is God equally committed to that idea?

Suppose that I were to suggest to you that we, along with some friends, should kidnap some member of the community, hold him captive for many years, feed him poorly, shackle him, and allow him no freedom. Of course, I spent a quarter century proposing candidates for just such treatment, and I was roundly commended for my efforts. "Wait", you will say. "Those were criminals! They broke the law! They deserved to be treated badly."

That's the very idea I want you to think about. What if the measure of our lives isn't the errors of our past,

but the promise of our future? How willingly would we give up the idea that we are entitled to inflict suffering on others by virtue of their past bad conduct in favor of a restorative justice? Wouldn't we feel that this is, in itself, unjust?

If we preach about a judgmental God, everybody is pretty much OK with that because we understand (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) that such a God is only judgmental towards the sins of others, never toward righteous us. On the other hand, preaching about a loving, forgiving God tends to go up our noses because any hint that those others and their sins are to be forgiven means that they “get away with it”. How would we feel about the possibility that there is no permanent record?

Sort of begs the question, though, doesn't it? We have to admit that people do the most awful things. Two college students are currently in custody charged with

the abduction and murder of a thirteen year old girl. Certainly, we as a society have the duty to respond to that in some way. The tricky part is to recognize that necessity as a duty and not as a right. Somebody else's bad behavior does not grant to us a right to behave badly toward them in return. That's revenge. Rather, evil within the community imposes upon us a duty to restore the community. That's a difference so important that I scarcely have words to describe it. In the community and within ourselves, our response to evil has to be restorative, not destructive. The measure of our lives can't be limited to the errors of our past, but must incorporate the promise of our future.

That's all pretty cerebral. We need someone to help us bring it down to the nitty gritty, and that someone is a persistent felony offender of my acquaintance known among law enforcement as "Shady Grady". Shady

Grady stole cars. I asked him once why he kept doing that and he said, “Because they were there.” After a great number of stolen and recovered cars, and some considerable time behind bars, Grady did a remarkable thing: he changed his name and went into the used car business. He made a success of it, too. Some time after, there was an armed robbery at a convenience store near his home. He happened to see the robber running from the store with the cash till under his arm. Grady tackled him to the ground. When the police arrived, the robber was shouting, “Let me go! I didn’t do nothing!” and Grady was shouting, “I’m a convicted felon! I know a robbery when I see one!” The measure of Grady’s life was not his past errors, but the promise of his future.

We are, each of us, a work in progress. And most surprising of all, God’s relationship with His children is also a work in progress. This is Transfiguration Sunday

when we contemplate a sea change in the history of the world.

Our text from the Old Testament tells of Moses receiving the Law.

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 skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Luke, then, tells us:

About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Luke has made both the parallel and the contrast



very clear: encounters with God transform us. But more than that, in the case of Jesus, the story of God's relationship with his children is transformed because during the Transfiguration of Jesus, there is no veil. Paul addresses this vital difference in a letter to the church at Corinth in this way:

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 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. 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. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being trans-

formed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

With the coming of Jesus, something happened! Things are not as they were! The question is: how are the Disciples to relate to this? Peter wants to commemorate the event and stay there, building booths. That is the wrong answer. Locking yourself up in the church house is not the right way to relate to this new circumstance, just as locking Shady Grady up for life would not have been the right way to respond to his crimes. Rather, the transfiguration of Jesus signals the transformation of the world, and we are to recognize God's work in the world. The Disciples must go down the mountain, to where God's children are, and bring this new relationship to them. Of course, we know they won't do this. Peter will still deny Jesus. The rest will

still cut and run. The world has been transformed, but the individuals closest to the event have not yet been transformed. That personal transformation will have to wait for the cross and the empty tomb because the transformation of the world can only be understood through that lens.

It is that personal transformation which happens when each of us encounters God that forms the promise of our futures. It is the growing into the relationship which God wishes us to have with Him which is the measure of our lives. It is turning from a world in which punishment must follow mistake toward a world in which we live in awareness of God's love which is the measure of our lives.

AMEN



## BENEDICTION

Kathy and I took a little trip to Virginia this week and had a great time. We needed that. On the West Virginia turnpike, however, the people who drive cars but have no brains were having a convention. One little Honda came whizzing by me, then changed lanes without a signal. Several miles up the road, we saw him again, this time in the company of a gentleman with a car sporting blue lights.

Oh, man! That is so satisfying. His permanent record was going to get a big fat mark, and I was happy about that. Why should someone else's trouble please me so?

May the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and

give you peace

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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