

Through a Glass Darkly

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Transfiguration

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.” Exodus 34:29

Every week lately I feel like I begin it’s been a hard week on Cape Cod, in America, on Planet Earth. And that is a cop-out. It is a lazy tendency for me to assume that my struggles or our struggles in this time and place are harder than the struggles and temptations of other people in other times and places. Reading the Bible, looking to find new and old truths within the Hebrew Scriptures and Torah, the New Testament and contemporary writings and news isn’t a new challenge. It remains the challenge of being human.

And where is God in all of this? Do we want God to show up dressed in robes and wearing a white beard and throw down some divine justice? Do we want a God to come smash some heads and ride on a white stallion as a conquering king? Are we looking for a God who will separate the waters and hold back chaos to let us like Moses and his people did back in Exodus as they escaped slavery and poverty in Egypt to return to the Promised Land?

This is the last week in our Lectionary cycle before we enter the season of Lent, a time where we contemplate the life and death of Christ as we prepare for the Resurrection that we remember each Easter Sunday. Traditionally in the Church, we have feasted and eaten all the flour, enjoyed food that is full of fat like donuts in Poland and king cakes from New Orleans and pancakes across Christian nations. All this feasting is traditionally done up to Tuesday, and then on Wednesday, we remember that we are mortal. That our flesh will pass away and we will return to the dust from where we came. Traditionally, clergy have marked the faithful Christians heads with ashes in the sign of a cross that we are to wear

out in the world as a public symbol of our adherence to Christ and humility before God.

While we do not have an Ash Wednesday service scheduled for this Wednesday, I invite you to take some time in private prayer to remember your own mortality.

The gift of that is a reminder that each day could be our last, so live it with gratitude, with joy, with solemnity if you must, with hope in the resurrection and reminder that God wins in the end. The body may fail, but the spirit lives on. This is our faith down into a swift cross a physical action reminding us that Christ died on a cross without any sin to save us all from eternal death. He gave his life so that we can have life and life abundant.

In the meantime, today, this Saturday and for the next few days until Wednesday, let the good times roll!

Eat the cakes!

Make the good food!

Watch movies!

Dance like no one is watching!

Thank God for the beauty of the sun rising through your curtains in the morning and the sun setting at the end of your day. Thank God for the aging body you inhabit because you are still alive to inhabit it! Rather than curse your aching joints, healing knees, sore ankles, headaches and stiff backs, bless them for the cranky reminder that you and I are alive and struggling to heal.

For our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. And the earth that we came from and the stars that we are made of will gather us back at the end of our time. And God, the one I haven't seen yet, will call us home.

Today's scripture reading comes from the book of Exodus. Moses, a Jewish man, was born a baby sentenced to death at birth. His mother and sisters put him in a Moses basket and set him free into the river Nile. An Egyptian princess saw him

and had her handmaidens pull his little basket from the river and she adopted him and named him Moses which means “taken out of the water.” Moses lived an unusually long life, 120 years.

Our reading comes from the second part of his life after Moses had led his people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land of Sinai. The people were angry when Moses went away to talk to God for such a long time. In their anger, they constructed a Golden Calf out of all their golden rings. Aaron, Moses’ brother, was vying for control of the people and used their fear and frustration to create a false God to be worshipped in the form of a Giant Golden Calf. Now Moses, he really didn’t want to go back to the mobs of people worshipping a Golden Calf and God forced him back. Moses wanted to stay on the Mountain, and God keeps sending him back encouraging him to help lead the people on to freedom. One last time, Moses climbs Mount Sinai and God gives him two stone tablets that we are all familiar with. One that said, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind” and the other nine commandments.

After being up on Mount Sinai looking at the face of God, Moses’ face shone with a brilliance brighter than the sun. He shone so bright everyone was terrified of his face. The Light of God had made him look like a fearsome and crazy man. Moses presented the two huge stone tablets and God’s ten commandments and then he put on a veil to cover his face. He needed to veil his face because he shone with a brightness that could not be handled by the naked eye.

I don’t relate to Moses at all. I have never seen the face of God. I don’t wear a veil typically. I didn’t wear a bridal veil although my mother, grandmother and daughters did. I have worn a veil at the Taj Mahal Temple in India to keep the relentless sun off my head and to be respectful. I have never worshipped in a

mosque and the synagogues I have worshipped in have all been Reform Judaism, so I was not required to wear a veil. And yet, the veil and how women have historically and today have worn and use the veil is extremely important. Men and women veil, but more often in all religious traditions it is women, and the veil is used for modesty before others and before God. This is why Moses wore a veil. He wore a veil to cover his face in modesty and humility before ordinary Jews as he was shining so brightly with God's light that he became a threat.

The people who followed Moses, the Jews were wandering in the desert without an official land. They were searching for a place to call home, for safety, for water, for food, for God, for love, for freedom. For all the things that all people search for. We all need freedom, food, rest, love, family, religious freedom, hope, and if possible, joy, music, health, community.

Moses' story in the Bible up one seventh of the Bible. The Jews consider Moses to be one of the most important fathers of the faith. Christians know we need Moses for all the rest of the story moving from Abraham to Jesus to the present. Moses wrote five books of the Bible and the 90th Psalm. He married Zipporah and had two sons. After receiving the ten commandments, Moses leads the Israelites into the "Promised Land."

So, what are we to make of this strange text this week?

First, I invite you to participate in all the Fat Tuesday and weekend activities of Mardi Gras. In New Orleans people wear these three colors.

 Purple – Justice |  Green – Faith |  Gold – Power

These colors remind us of God's justice, faithfulness, and inclusive love for ALL people—no exceptions!

♥ Purple – Justice – A color of royalty and wisdom, purple also represents our call to seek justice and equity for all. As people of faith, we strive to follow Jesus' example of radical love and inclusion (Micah 6:8).

♥ Green – Faith – Green symbolizes life, renewal, and spiritual growth. It reminds us that God's love is everlasting and that we are continually being transformed by grace (2 Corinthians 5:17).

♥ Gold – Power – Gold represents God's divine light, generosity, and abundance. It calls us to share our gifts with the world and recognize the sacred worth of every person

Eat the fun food! Celebrate the goodness of life! And recognize that justice, faith and power will give us strength for the fat times as well as the fasting times.

On Wednesday, March 5th, we will remember Ash Wednesday and our own mortality. Thus, entering a forty-day period with mini celebrations on Sundays as we enter fast times. We are not as strict as some Catholic or Orthodox Christians requiring fish on Fridays or fasting all the time. What you eat is between you and God. You can tell your spouse, friend or doctor, but I don't care. That's your business. What we can fast from is hate. We can fast from things that separate us from the love of God and the practice of being like Christ.

While I have never seen the face of God, I have seen the face of God through the faces of people I love. I watched a 2020 Live Production of Les Miserables in the West End of London last night and wept with joy and sorrow as the music came to an end. This is one of the many messages of that brilliant musical.

“To love another person is to see the face of God” is a quote from Victor Hugo's novel Les Misérables. The quote appears in the Broadway production of the musical. The quote is a call to holiness and vocation, and illustrates the idea that love is an action, not a feeling. In Hugo's religious understanding, love always wins.

In Judaism, the idea that "to love another person is to see the face of God" is connected to the value of *b'tzelem elohim*, which means that humans are created in the image of God. In the story, Jean Valjean, a Frenchman who spent 19 years in prison for stealing food for his nephew, never stops caring for others. He puts others before himself and receives and gives mercy.

Leave here remembering that love always wins. Sing the songs of Les Misérables as you exit and listen to the songs that echo on and on, remembering always that “to love another person is to see the face of God.”

For tonight, that is my best understanding of the text so far. I am open to new understanding and unveilings as I evolve and grow as person to the very end of this life. May you be loved and love, and in that see the face of God. Amen.