

## Transfiguration—C

Exodus 34:29-35

### Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory of the Coming of the LORD

The Battle Hymn of the Republic by Julia Ward Howe goes as follows . . .

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps: His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:  
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel, Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, While God is marching on.

It's a beautiful song, isn't it? In the song Julia mentions seeing the glory of the Lord—where? In his judgment. She wrote this as she was walking through a Union encampment during the Civil War, and she felt that she could see the glory of the Lord in the camps of armies who were trying to set men free.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday—a day that we celebrate and see how God reveals His glory—to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in today's text, to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Have you ever seen the glory of the Lord? You may not think you have, but you have. As we look at today's text we too will be able to say: Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory of the Coming of the LORD.

#### I. In different ways and different places

As we talk about God revealing his glory it's interesting to note all of the different ways in the Scriptures in which God reveals himself. Today's text talks about how Moses was able to go up and speak to God face to face.

Some of the most interesting Bible passages are when God reveals himself in a special manifestation called the "cavode Adonai," the Glory of the Lord. There are a couple examples of God showing the Glory of the Lord. Take for instance the LORD appearing to Moses at the burning bush. Moses had to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground.

Or think of the way that God made his appearance known to the Israelites when they were traveling running from Pharaoh through the desert. Exodus 13 says: "*By day the LORD*

*went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night... Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.”* What an awesome sight that must have been to have a pillar of cloud leading you from place to place and a pillar of fire guiding you by night. What an awesome sight that must have been.

Today, as we look at the Transfiguration we see another special manifestation of God to Peter, James and John. After Jesus leads them up a high mountain, all of the sudden his face and even his clothes start to shine like lightning. Then what happens? A cloud envelops them and the LORD speaks to them. What a sight.

Now look at our God’s Word in the book of Exodus for today. Moses was able to go into a more direct presence of the Lord and receive the Ten Commandments directly from God, putting them on tablets of stone. The glory of the Lord was so glorious that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai his face was so bright that it scared the Israelites.

When you think back on all of these examples of God giving a great and glorious vision of himself it’s hard for us to envision, isn’t it? Wouldn’t it just be an awesome sight to have the Lord appear to us like he did to Moses and the Israelites, to see the big pillar of fire hovering above? Or to have the Lord pass in front of us as he did to Moses? You would think: “If God would appear to me like that, oh, how I would be so encouraged to really serve him. I wouldn’t worry so much about life!” And so we ask: “Oh Lord, where is my burning bush? Where is my vision of your glory?” Let me see something.

First of all, those who did see the great miracles in the Bible did not always start believing. Many times they quickly abandoned the Lord as soon as he did not measure up to an expectation of theirs. Seeing miracles does not always mean instant faith.

The other problem that that kind of thinking reflects is: poor eyesight. That can be our problem. Not a one of us can say that we have not seen the glory of the Lord. The problem is that we are not looking in the right places. When the Lord appeared to Elijah, he didn’t come in an earthquake or a mighty tornado. He appeared in a whisper. Look at that in today’s terms. In Acts 2:38, God says that when you are baptized that you receive “*the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” The Spirit doesn’t come in a tongue of fire, but in water, a simple substance with no flash to it. Ephesians 6:17 says: “*The sword of the Spirit is the word of God.*” Here we have people running here and there for every new manifestation of the Spirit—climbing up mountains and joining monasteries, looking to every gimmick under the book. And all the while they fail to realize that God himself descends from heaven and reveals himself in his Word and in the simple water of Baptism. How often do we overlook the glory of God in the simple things of life—the Word of God on our shelves, the beauty of a mountainside, and the wonders of a new baby being born? It’s as if there’s a veil over our faces so we can’t see the glory of God right in front of us.

In our second lesson St. Paul emphasized this point. Paul basically said: we have more glorious sights than Moses did because we are living under the ministry of the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ. Think about how much more we have than they did in the Old Testament. We know who the Christ is. We know what he did. We are living under the freedom of knowing that Jesus has given us salvation through his blood. We aren’t living under the ministry of the law that only condemns us. Think of how much more we have even than the New Testament believers. We all have the Word of God nicely assembled and sitting at our fingertips. But we feel that we are lacking something because God doesn’t appear to us in a pillar of fire or on a mountain top. But thank God that Jesus died for our bad eyesight—that he

replaced our eyesight and gave us new eyes of faith, enabling us to see the glory of his forgiveness.

## II. For similar purposes

We know that God reveals himself in different ways in different places. Did you ever wonder why he doesn't appear to us as he did to Moses or Elijah or the Israelites? Why did they get such visual appearances of God while we do not? It's a good question.

Let's look at the background of when and why God appeared and showed his glory when he did. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, it was a very crucial point in his life and the life of the Israelites. They had been under the oppression of the Egyptians and been crying out for help for over 80 years. It was at this period in time that God decided to call Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage and into the Promised Land.

Later on, as the Israelites were about to leave Egypt, approximately 2 million people would be traveling through an absolute wilderness. And what was worse they would have the Egyptian army running after them. How would they be able to survive? God described what his presence did: *"The pillar of cloud moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long."*

When Jesus transfigured before the disciples Peter, James, and John, remember what was about to happen. These leaders of the church were about to see the man that they believed was the Messiah and chosen one be arrested. They would see him be mocked. They would see him be crucified and die. The hope of Israel whom they still thought was going to establish an earthly kingdom was about to be put to death. What a trying period this would be for them.

And think of the background of this lesson. Here the Israelites had just previously finished worshiping the golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Now Moses had to lead these people from the point of Mt. Sinai and back into the desert. They would be in danger from the other countries on the way to the Promised Land. So Moses said to God: *"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"* It was at this trying point in Moses' life that God appeared to Moses and showed Moses that he was a compassionate and gracious God. Then God proceeded to give Moses the Ten Commandments on top of Mt. Sinai in his very presence.

If you look at all of these instances where God would give his disciples a glorious vision of his presence, what is the common thread that runs through all of them? In every instance, the people of God were about to face a very difficult situation. In order to give them extra courage and comfort to make it through, God gave them a special vision of himself.

The disciples were able to look back on the Transfiguration after Jesus had been crucified and remember that Jesus really was God. Moses was able to lead the Israelites out of the desert when God assured him of his divine presence. And think about today's lesson. The Israelites were a very stiff necked people. They would easily fall away from God's grace and forget the fact that the Savior was to be born. As they went into the desert and Promised Land, they would easily turn away from God. And so God had Moses go up and receive the Ten Commandments and come back with a glowing face to send a message to the Israelites: "I am God. You are sinful. You need a savior." He wanted to impress upon them his holiness so that they would fear him and look forward to the coming Messiah. That's why Moses covered his face when the

glory started fading. God didn't want them to think that God wasn't serious about the Law. If they had seen Moses' face dim, then they wouldn't have been as impressed with the Law. It all goes to show that God showed his glory to encourage his people during trying times to come. And it worked. God's glorious law was able to keep some of the Israelites humble and prepare them for the Savior.

We have seen some pretty great things through the eyes of faith. If it is true that we have a more glorious vision of God than the Israelites did who were given the vision of Moses' face at Mt. Sinai, what does that tell us? With the glory of the Gospel having been revealed to us, we may have a more difficult chore ahead of us than they did. What does God have in store for us? Will we also be led into a desert? No. But Jesus did reveal some of the things that we will go through in Matthew 24-25. He says we'll live during famines and earthquakes, where false prophets abound, where the love of most grows cold and many fall away. He says that as the end nears things will only get worse. We are living in those times.

And think about where we are in the Church Year. We are about to follow Jesus as he goes to Dark Gethsemane. We're going to see him be tempted by the devil. We're going to see him be betrayed. We're going to see him get a crown of thorns be put on his head. And we're going to be reminded that it was for our sins that Jesus went there. It's going to be a difficult thing for us to do.

So what are you going to do about it? I had a friend who told me: "Every time I get depressed I go out and buy something." Some people go and drown their sorrows. Others punish themselves by abusing their body. Is that how you deal with difficulties in your life? Is that how God dealt with weakness and difficult times ahead? Did God say to Moses: "Go have a beer Moses; it will all be all right?" "Go buy yourself a new tunic and that will make you feel better?" "Go bang your head on these tablets of stone for a while and you'll feel better?" No.

What did God do? He assured Moses of his presence. Isn't that what we need to do as well today? When we face difficult times in our lives, it is at that time more than ever that we need to listen to God's Word. It is at that time more than ever that we need the body and blood of the Lord to assure us that our sins have been paid for. When we taste and see that the Lord is good, gracious, and compassionate and forgiving, that he is still with us, it will give us the courage to stand firm against the assaults of Satan and every evil. That's why James encourages us in 5:8: "*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*"

What is the most incredible thing you've seen in your life? You may have different things go through your mind. But think about the most incredible thing you've seen. Isn't it the fact that you're seeing through the eyes of faith—that Jesus is the true God and Savior of the world. When you see that, your eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. With that glory of the Lord before your eyes you can face whatever God allows to happen. And most importantly, you can say with Job: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*" Amen.