

Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw the skin of Moses' face shining brightly, they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called them closer. So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² After that, all the Israelites came near as well, and Moses commanded them everything that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ Whenever Moses went into the Lord's presence to speak with him, Moses would take the veil off until he came out again. When Moses came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was shining brightly. So Moses would put the veil on his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the Lord.

Psalm 99

The Lord rules—
the nations shake!
He sits enthroned on the winged heavenly creatures—
the earth quakes!
² The Lord is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the nations.
³ Let them thank your great and awesome name.
He is holy!
⁴ Strong king  who loves justice,
you are the one who established what is fair.
You worked justice and righteousness in Jacob.
⁵ Magnify the Lord, our God!
Bow low at his footstool!
He is holy!
⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel too among those who called on his name.
They cried out to the Lord, and he himself answered them—
⁷ he spoke to them from a pillar of cloud.
They kept the laws and the rules God gave to them.
⁸ Lord our God, you answered them.
To them you were a God who forgives
but also the one who avenged their wrong deeds.
⁹ Magnify the Lord our God!
Bow low at his holy mountain
because the Lord our God is holy!

Luke 9:28-36 [37-43a]

²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said these things, he took Peter, John, and James, and went up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes flashed white like lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him. ³¹ They were clothed with heavenly splendor and spoke about Jesus' departure, which he would achieve in Jerusalem. ³² Peter and those with him were

almost overcome by sleep, but they managed to stay awake and saw his glory as well as the two men with him.

³³ As the two men were about to leave Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it's good that we're here. We should construct three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—but he didn't know what he was saying. ³⁴ Peter was still speaking when a cloud overshadowed them. As they entered the cloud, they were overcome with awe.

³⁵ Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!"³⁶ Even as the voice spoke, Jesus was found alone. They were speechless and at the time told no one what they had seen.

³⁷ The next day, when Jesus, Peter, John, and James had come down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. ³⁸ A man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to take a look at my son, my only child. ³⁹ Look, a spirit seizes him and, without any warning, he screams. It shakes him and causes him to foam at the mouth. It tortures him and rarely leaves him alone. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to throw it out, but they couldn't."

⁴¹ Jesus answered, "You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." ⁴² While he was coming, the demon threw him down and shook him violently. Jesus spoke harshly to the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ Everyone was overwhelmed by God's greatness.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We've spent the last few weeks discussing the future that God has in store for us, about how 2016 might look like Year of the Lord's Favor might in our context. We've talked about the mission of this year, hearing that we're sent to others. We've talked about the centrality of Christ in the midst of this year, remembering that Jesus is the center of our present and our future. We've seen that the year of the Lord's favor means that even the most unlikely of people might receive God's favor. Perhaps most importantly, we've seen that, in the midst of this tension that we find, God promises to be present, to be active, and to walk with us along the journey, to never abandon us and yet always surprise us.

And then today, the lightning brightness of God pierces our hearts, our lives, our futures, and casts a new light on this conversation. How will we respond to this future that God is laying before us? Here on this mountaintop, we see Jesus, and through Jesus we see all things. That's the thing about light. Without light, we can't see anything. We need light for vision. We need light to see the path ahead. We need this Jesus, who's light shines in the darkness, and there's no way that those shadows can drown out Christ's light. But what do we do, how do we respond, as we're overcome with that light?

Perhaps we might see ourselves in the responses of the disciples, though their first response is shocking in it's grogginess. The first thing the disciples do in the light of Christ's brightness is almost fall asleep! They managed to stay awake, Luke says, and saw the glory of God as Christ's transformation illumines the world around them. This might

seem shocking at first – how do you almost fall asleep in the midst of this eclipse of God's glory – but how often has our weariness led us to miss exciting events? Once my family drove from Ohio to New York City, driving all day to make a show of *Les Miserables* on Broadway that night. Overcome by exhaustion, my mom barely made it through the first scene before she began snoring. That was the most expensive, least comfortable nap, and trust me: she's never lived this story down! But the point is, maybe the disciples' exhaustion isn't so far from our own experience. Sometimes, we overcommit ourselves, overextend our time, and overwork our bodies, and the resulting exhaustion can prevent us from seeing even the most glorious work of God at hand.

Once awake, though, the disciples rebound. For another blunder. Peter suggests that the disciples build homes for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. While at first this might

seem like an act of hospitality, it's more like a coup. Rather than let Christ's fiery beacon emblazon the image of God across creation, Peter tried to hide that light under a bushel. And as the Sunday school song says, NO. That's not a good idea, because this response is an attempt to confine the light that Christ shines rather than seeing where Christ shines that spotlight. We're not meant to withhold God's light only for our purposes or personal reasons. We're called to follow God's majestic, boundless freedom as it careens across the universe with justice and peace. And though Peter seeks to control for reasons unknown, Jesus knows better, and puts the kibosh on that idea.

After things seem to normalize, as the light fades and the mystical Elijah and Moses disappear, the disciples take a different posture: silence. Perhaps shamed by their brazen attempt to control god, a fear sets in. Afraid to speak the powerful truth they experienced, no matter who excellent,

no matter how bright, this also reveals the hesitancy that often lies at the core of our own lives. If we're not in control of God, then we're not quite certain what to say at times. How do we describe this, that our friend Jesus suddenly became inexplicably bright, as though lightening burst through his very veins? At the light of Christ and the Word of God spoken into creation, the disciples remained silent rather than speaking aloud the light of God's truth.

Then, we come to the final part of Luke's story today. At first, we might wonder why the healing of this little boy is included in the Transfiguration story. Does it truly belong? It does, because we find that the disciples don't follow through on the work given to them by Jesus. A few verse earlier in Luke 9, Jesus sends the disciples out with, to quote verse 1, "power and authority over all demons and sicknesses." And yet, here after the transfiguration, we see that they couldn't, or maybe just didn't, follow through on

the work God commissioned. Even in light of the Transfiguration, the disciples struggle to trust Jesus, to follow him into the future that he's not just promised to them, but that he's empowered them to live. How often have we been there, knowing what God's called us to do but unwilling, unable, or just afraid to do it?

Do we see ourselves in the disciples? Perhaps, for us, the people of God at Christ Lutheran Church, seeking to live into the future God has in store for us, we might take the disciples reactions as warnings, as advice on how not to respond to the light of Christ in our lives. In each of these places, how might we dive in to the love that God extends?

To live fully in the future that God has for us, we must remain awake. In other words, we must pay attention. This isn't just about falling asleep, but about training ourselves to see God and to see how the light of God illuminates the world. Sometimes we fall asleep because we don't expect

to see God alive and at work. Sometimes we daydream because we don't believe God's active in the real world. Through spiritual disciplines like prayer, bible study, worship, and service, we need to pay attention to God's work in the world. We must train our eyes to see God's action, our ears to hear God's words, our nerves to feel God's movement. In the present and future, God's already at work. We must work to first recognize that.

We've also got to guard against the dangerous desire that we feel sometimes, that tendency to try and control God, that temptation from the shadows that refuses to let God be God and says, instead, "maybe I could be god!" Rather than build Jesus a house to confine the light he shines or to coerce that power God emanates for our benefit, we're called to confront the new light that Christ shines, and all that it shows us. The voice of Jesus calls from the center of our lives and the future of our world at the

same time, reminding us simultaneously that we're not alone in our present tensions and that Jesus already inhabits the future of blessing that he's promised us. We need not shrink from injustice, but instead face it with God's justice. We need not run from discord, but face it with God's peace. We must go where the light shines to spread the merciful light of Christ. God's transfiguration isn't meant just for our personal use, and all too often, abuse because, even when we try to contain it, light pushes through. That's another wonderful thing about light, and especially the light that Christ shines today. We can't stop the light of God from brightening our future, from illuminating our lives, from opening us to the beauty of God's Kingdom that's already here in the world.

And with this in mind, we can't stay silent, nor should we want to! The story of God must be told. The light of Christ must be shined. The Spirit's breath must be breathed. When

we're attentive to the light of Christ, when that brightness blinds us and demands some Ray Bands, AND when we given up trying to control God's movement, when we've stopped trying to contain God in the shackles of our fear, then we find our rightful role, our identities, as proclaimers of the Gospel, the speakers of God's word, the children of God living the life of God given by the Spirit of God.

And, most important of all as we stand here, leaning over the precipice of our future as a congregation: When we know the future God calls us into, we can't refuse to go and we can't refuse to do. Just as the disciples were sent to heal, God is sending us with a purpose of blessing in mind. The choice of obedience to that call? That's up to us. In the ELCA's mission redeveloper training sessions held across the country, one reminder begins and ends most conversations. God is going to build the church with or without us, and it's always better for us to be working alongside God, following

God's lead, taking God's cues and living the life God calls us to live. God will work with or without us, but when God works through our hands? That's when the Kingdom comes near to us and to our community.

The transfiguration of Jesus is a sign of things to come. The entire world will be transformed by the light of God. One day, that mountaintop experience will become our daily lives. Despite the tensions we face in the present and the uncertainties we struggle with in our lives, we know that God's light shines in the darkness and nothing, not even our uncooperative tendencies, can overcome it. This light, this vibrancy, this newness, is a promise that we can hold to because of God's transfiguration before us, and it's a promise we can experience now as we walk toward our future with God and with one another.

Now hear me clearly. I know that it's not easy to undertake this journey, to speak and to act. This takes

courage. This takes faithfulness. This takes commitment. As a community, this means we must support one another. We need to gather around some times of prayer, of discernment, and of vision for the future. That begins next Sunday with our Lenten journey. On Wednesday evenings at 6pm we'll gather together for evening prayer and reflection on our Lenten journeys. We'll take time to consider the change that we hope God is bringing to our world and to ourselves. We'll gather to offer support to one another, to seek God's guidance together, and to focus on the light despite the shadows that might distress us. And after worship, those who want to are invited to gather for dinner at a different place each week, so we can begin to look for the light of Christ across the NRV, in restaurants and bars, in hostesses, waiters and patrons, each of whom God's calling us to love and serve, because God's shining a marvelous light toward each of them.

As we think about the bright Transfiguration of our Lord and the Lenten journey that follows, we might wonder: Where is the light of God shining in the world? What's preventing us from seeing that light? How can we support one another as we look for God's light to illuminate our future together as CLC?

May we journey faithfully into this future together, with God and toward God. Amen.