

February 27, 2022

“The Big Reveal”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings

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 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, 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 the 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 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings 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 “The Big Reveal”

Good Morning People of God! I remember an elderly man, who loved to give me advice at my first church. He said “Pastor if you want to be loved by your congregation, always keep your sermons short on Communion Sundays, Superbowl Sundays or Sundays when there is a congregational meeting following the service. So I will try to heed his advice this morning.

There have been so many weeks in the almost two years that I have been your pastor in some capacity or another that I just want to start my sermon with a “Lord, what a week!” and this is certainly one of those weeks.

It seems like the world is full of people who just live to cause drama, who seek attention rather than peace and choose ego and self-interest over the welfare of others every time. It’s as if each day this week just had giant mood swings. But there can’t be a better week to talk about mountaintops and valleys in our lives right?

So what’s the good stuff this week? The covid cases are way down, we can unmask, yay!!! We should be having celebrations in the streets but oh, wait, Russia invaded Ukraine, same week.

How about this, equality claimed a new first with the first African American woman nominated for the Supreme Court but that didn’t get the headlines really since the Texas Governor pulled us back into the dark ages of inequality with his soul-damaging stunt. Criminalizing supporting your children as they navigate the already painful waters of wrestling with their gender identity. Shame on him.

Did I ever tell you I once kidnapped the Governor of Texas at gunpoint? I kid you not, it was a toy gun and it was in a different time. I was dressed up like a cowboy with toy pistols in my holster. My University of Texas sorority sisters and I, with his full knowledge, showed up at his office with the press and kidnapped him, put him in fake jail until he raised enough ransom from other legislators for the American Heart Association.

Not only are fake guns probably not allowed in the state capitol anymore, but this current Governor would probably have this gender bender locked up in real jail for being in men’s clothing, including real chaps and a Stetson hat. I digress, but I didn’t want to miss the one chance I may ever get to work that story into a sermon.

My job up here is not to go too much on about the world stage but to take these, beautiful, powerful, evocative scriptures and try and reveal something new that you can apply to your very, real lives.

I happen to know that some of you have been living through some pretty awful ups and downs too. Good news one minute, awful news the next, new grandbabies, good medical results on tests, then boom, loss or illness of a friend or family member.

Both of these scriptures take us to the mountaintops where we encounter God. In the scripture about Moses what pulled at me was that it was when he was with God that he could take his veil off, be his true self, no pretense, no defense, nothing between he and God. Whew, I got that all those years trying to be somebody I wasn’t, you can’t live your best life while you’re still living your best lie. But Moses and God kept it real. How ironic we get to stand here this morning with our masks off for the first time, nothing between us and God or each other.

But when Moses went back down the mountain into the valley full of humans he had to hide himself again, because they couldn't handle the truth, that he was encountering God and that God was using him to continue to lead them from bondage into the promised land.

Moses was glowing with power when he'd come back into that valley and all that did was make the humans afraid of him. What did Moses do with the power of his encounter with God? He tries to set his people free, to help them to treat each other better, to love one another, to love God.

In the story with Jesus we see a theological evolution as we often do. Not only can Jesus be himself in front of God, but he also has the support of his ancestors in faith, Elijah and Moses. They are looking after him, giving him support before the hard journey he has ahead.

And this time, this time Jesus trusts his inner circle as well, his three closest friends. He trusts them to see him for his true self, in his full power and glory. He is glowing with the power of God. But what does Jesus do with his power? Jesus goes back down the mountain, tries to heal everyone who needs healing, teaches those who need teaching, and loves all those who need loving.

Here we have two men given incredible power and what do they try and do with it? They try to set people free, to love people, to heal people, they are humble about it, they don't brag. That is what God's power looks like. You don't need to look any further back than this week to know what kind of turn the power of man can take.

I like Peter's reaction, that would have so been me. I'm half asleep thinking when is Jesus going to finish praying and then poof! There is all that light, power, Moses, Elijah and God. I'd be like "I'm awake now, and when it was all over I'd say, I don't want this day to end, let's build a monument to it. I don't want to go back down into the valley with all those humans.

But life doesn't work that way, does it? We will always have those ups and downs, those mountain tops and valleys and everything in between.

Julie and I have a tradition that spans the last 22 years where we try to see all the academy award nominated films before the big night of the awards.

Sometimes I have no clue why some of the pictures get nominated but we recently watched the film "Belfast" and I'm hoping it wins. One of the scenes that had me weeping was between this Grandfather called Pop, played by Claran Hinds. The movie, Judi Dench and this man have all been nominated for the Oscar.

Anyway, in this scene this little boy is sad because he might have to move away from Belfast because of the violence against Catholics in the late sixties. Now the boy and his family are Protestant, but they refuse to join in the hate, they refuse to pass the hate onto their children and they speak out against the violence done to their neighbors because well, Jesus for one, and they

are just decent people for another. This puts their lives at risk against the Catholic hating Protestants that want to “cleanse” the neighborhood.

But the little six year old Buddy doesn’t want to go, he doesn’t want to leave all that he has known and he doesn’t want to leave his Pop. So Pop asks him.

“You know who you are Buddy?”

“Yes, Pop.”

“You are Buddy from Belfast where everybody in the neighborhood knows you and they look out for you. Your Pop looks out for you, your Mummy and Da look out for you, your Granny, your Brother, your whole family looks out for you. And wherever you go and whatever you become, that’ll always be your truth and that thought will keep you, it will keep you happy - will you remember that for me buddy?”

“Yes Pop.”

He wanted him to remember that he was not alone, not anywhere, not anytime, not in any valley and not in any mountain. That’s our take away from this story of the transfiguration.

Jesus is forever transformed and emboldened by knowing this, that he was not alone, and that when he headed back down the mountain into that valley and finally into Jerusalem where he would die; his God, his people would look out for him. Peter and John and James were forever changed that day too, by knowing this– that they won’t be alone when they have to pick up Jesus’ mantle and carry on his ministry after his death. He will still be looking out for them.

Jesus’s story tells us that we aren’t alone in those valleys. We have the people that came before us looking out for us, we have our family looking out for us, we have our closest friends looking out for us, we have our church looking out for us, and we most certainly have our God looking out for us.

No matter who you are and what you are wrestling with, may you feel God’s presence with you in whatever valleys you are in, on whatever mountaintop you stand, no matter what the week ahead may throw our way. AMEN

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Amen