

Let us pray: Lord, show us your glory, that we may tell of your salvation.

What does your resting face look like? Your expression
when nobody else is around or you're thinking about other things?
I occasionally catch sight of mine in a store window or mirror and it's serious.
But if I see myself after I have been ministering in the Holy Spirit, praying with
people, leading worship, seeing people connect with the power of God?
There is energy and light in my face. I almost glow.

At the end of Epiphany every year we come to this place, this mountain,
this moment where Jesus brought three of his closest disciples with him
on what they thought was a hike, a retreat.

On that mountain, he is transfigured, which means his face changed,
and not only his face; even his clothes became dazzling white.

It's like the veil of Jesus' body momentarily disappeared
and his truest, deepest God-nature was revealed.

For me this is one of the stories in the Bible that hints that one element of
God's nature is pure energy. Light is a form of energy.

Big things happen on mountains in our sacred stories – people encounter God.
Moses, 40 days on Mount Sinai, glowed so bright with reflected glory
that when he came down they had to veil his face.

Elijah caught a glimpse of God on Mount Horeb, in sheer silence.

Jesus, shining in the splendor of his true identity, revealed for a moment.

We call spiritual high points in our lives "mountain top experiences.

The curtains part, and for a moment the membrane separating
this world and the other becomes wafer-thin.

And those moments of transcendence or closeness to the holy, or "a-hah!"
are often hinge moments, which shape and inspire and set our direction.

My "mountain-top" experiences have often occurred at spiritual retreats –
often we have to go apart from the daily routine to open our spirits to holy gifts.
I once attended a three-day renewal weekend, and it was all fine and good,
maybe a little silly, but nice... and late in the second day I experienced
what till then I had only vaguely heard about: the overwhelming love of God.
I felt it, and it changed my whole experience of faith.

That's called an "epiphany," a revelation of what is most real, most true. That's why this season after Christmas is called "Epiphany," because one after another, the reality of who God is in Jesus Christ was being revealed – first his birth, then the magi, then his baptism, his first miracle, his ministry. In each of these stories, someone "gets it," the truth of who Jesus is. And in this story, which always ends Epiphany season, his closest disciples get it. For a moment. He takes them up a mountain, and there being transfigured before them, his face changes, his clothes a dazzling white, like he becomes pure light. And if that's not enough, three more things happen to validate the experience: Moses and Elijah appear with him, talking so that the disciples can see them. Moses representing the Law of God, as he was the one to whom Torah given, and Elijah, the foremost of God's prophets, signifying that tradition.

Then cloud covers them suddenly, and out of the cloud the voice of God, so like the voice heard at Jesus' baptism: *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"* It's like God is saying, "I've told you before who he is; I'm telling you again, and I want you to listen to what he says. Because things are going to happen, that aren't going to make any sense to you..." Luke even tells us; *"and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen"*. Maybe they were afraid no one would believe them. Until stranger things happened. Much later, when Jesus' death did come, and then his rising, Peter, James and John would have this collective memory – shared by three witnesses, as the law demanded – so no one would think he was delusional.

Our Sunday services aren't exactly mountain-top experiences, but they are a time we come intentionally into God's presence, celebrate Jesus glorified as he was on that mountain, have a little encounter with Moses and Elijah in our readings, maybe hear the voice of God. But we don't get to stay on the mountain-top, do we? The valley awaits us. Today's reading from Corinthians talks about how Moses' face would shine so brightly with reflected glory after being in God's presence, it blinded people. Up the mountain, Moses was face to face with God, but the bottom he met fear and bewilderment.

It is so hard to remember that when we're confronted with illness and death, inequities in our own country, the threat of war and hardship. When we're caring for aging or infirm parents or spouses... How we live in the valley is the real measure of our faith, not the mountain-top.

Jesus is still shining, here in this place, out there in the world.
Can we see him here, and there? Can we discern him?

Or are we veiled to protect ourselves from dealing with the reality of God?
St. Paul wrote that, "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."

I believe we do see Jesus, but it's more often in the mess and muck of life.
We do see Jesus, but he may look a lot like us... because we may see him
in one another, and in the people with whom we break the bread in his name.
And in seeing him, we also are being him,
becoming so like him that others will see him in us.
Listen to Paul again: *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.*

That's a promise, a promise for "down the mountain."
That transfiguration, "face-changing" that Peter, James and John beheld –
that gradually happens to us, spiritually, as we take on the likeness of Christ.
As we allow the love of God to love us to transform us, even our faces change.
A *Water Daily* reader, who is in addiction recovery,
wrote me this week after one of my posts about this story. He said,
*Your reflection today struck a chord because one of the 'miracles' mentioned in
the rooms of AA is that you can tell when someone has gone through the point in
their recovery of a "spiritual awakening," because you can see it in their face.
Literally, it is as if their face lights up!*

Let Jesus take over in your life. Give more time, more space for that relationship.
Let Jesus take over in your heart. Let him reorder your priorities, your values.
As we take on the likeness of Christ, we become transformed,
and agents of transformation for others.
Like Moses, our faces will come to reflect the glory of God,
until God is all people can see.
That's Epiphany!

Amen.

Luke 9:28-43a

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.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

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.