

Exodus of Jesus

Sometimes I think we don't realize how fortunate we are to hear so much of the Bible on Sunday mornings. A lot of the *Book of Common Prayer* is based on Bible passages. Each week we also have three readings as well as a psalm. Whenever I've attended other churches, including ones that say they're Bible-based, I'm always surprised how little Scripture actually appears. In the Episcopal Church, we hear a lot of the Bible.

Today is one of those Sundays when all of the readings fit together as though they comment on one another. Moses comes down shining from Mount Sinai and puts a veil on his face; St. Paul interprets the veil; and then Jesus has his own luminous mountaintop experience. There's a lot going on here.

Let's start with Moses. He has just spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai while God wrote the two tablets of the covenant. After all of that time in God's presence, Moses' face shone with the reflection of God's glory. The brightness scared the people so he put a veil over his face. Moses couldn't speak with God through a veil, of course, so he took it off every time he was in God's presence.

Paul had a different spin on the veil of Moses. He said that God's glory would inevitably fade from the face of Moses, so the veil was used to hide that fact. Only through Christ, Paul said, is God's glory accessible for all time, and the veil is no longer necessary.

Peter and John and James saw the glory of Jesus firsthand when they went up a mountain with him. Each Evangelist describes the Transfiguration in a slightly different way. In Luke's version, Jesus is at prayer when he literally "becomes other" and his clothing flashes like lightning. Moses and Elijah also appear in glory, speaking of Jesus' departure. The word for departure is literally "exodus." Moses and Elijah are talking about the exodus of Jesus.

What does it mean for Jesus to have an exodus? The first Exodus was the defining event for Israel, turning them from slaves into conquerors. God led them from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Through plagues in Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea, the Exodus began with a mighty show of God's power. God led Israel through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When God threatened to abandon them because of their sinfulness, Moses had to intercede.

The Exodus of Jesus will be the defining moment for all who believe in him, leading them from the bondage of sin to the freedom of grace and forgiveness. In Jesus God's show of power will be a paradox as he dies on a cross. Yet through his resurrection he will be confirmed as the Son of God. His final words to his disciples will be "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Today is the Last Sunday after Epiphany. Lent arrives in a few days on Ash Wednesday. Each year the Transfiguration shows up on this Sunday as we prepare for Lent. Today, in particular, we can see the great arc of our faith. God is still with us, and will lead us from bondage to freedom. The glory of Jesus will never fade, and he will never abandon his people.

During Lent's forty days we have the opportunity to reflect on where we are still in bondage to sin, allowing the glory of God to fade. We take our own Exodus through the wilderness to the darkness of the cross, before we see the dazzling white glory of the empty tomb. As this long Epiphany season ends, think about how you can prepare yourself for the holy journey of Lent that is before you.

[Last Sunday after Epiphany: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43.]