

## **Glory Revealed**

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February 14, 2010

For those of you who are parents of grade school kids or are teachers you were probably well aware that today is Valentine's Day. Or maybe you are celebrating a significant relationship in your life today that made you aware of this pink, red, and white hearted holiday. And if you do celebrate Valentines you probably went down to the Hallmark store on 8<sup>th</sup> Street to find that right card for the one you love. Well I too went down to that Hallmark store and I too was looking for a card. But the card I was looking for was of a different emphasis. I was looking for a card that celebrated the Transfiguration, since today is Transfiguration Sunday. I scanned rows and rows of red and pink "be my Valentine" cards...and rows of birthday for him and birthday for her but no Transfiguration Card. I thought maybe I could find a blank card with Raphael's 1520 painting of the Transfiguration on it or a beautiful Eastern Orthodox Iconic image on a card that read "God's glory Revealed to us today" – but no such luck. I am not too surprised that I didn't find a Transfiguration Card – after all, how many people in the church actually know what this holy holiday is about? Odds are, most of us here didn't grow

up celebrating the Transfiguration or, truth be told, didn't know today was Transfiguration Sunday. Well you are in luck coming to Hope Church this morning – because today you have the chance to delve into the Word and let the Spirit dance in your eardrums as we discover and listen to our Christian story together. Our story that celebrates the Transfiguration – the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In order to know where we are going with the Transfiguration Today, we need to look back where we have been. So let us begin with the Exodus story and pilgrimage our way from there.

The book of Exodus, you will remember, is a book about Israel and God's relationship to Israel. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites with forced labor. But the "Lord, a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," hears the cry of the Israelites, the oppressed children of God, and desires to free them from the hands of the oppressive Egyptians. Because this God, the God of Abraham, Issac, Moses, and Jesus – our God – is always on the move freeing people from the systems of oppression. Even today, this God is ferociously on the move to liberate people from bondage. God raises up a man by the name of Moses and says to him, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry....I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from

the Egyptians” (3:7). So Moses and God have this encounter at a burning bush where God calls Moses to lead the nation of Israel out of the hands of oppression from the Egyptians.

Moses sent by “(t)he Lord, the God of Israel’s ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” goes to the elders of Israel and begins to assemble the leaders in order to bring Israel out of the misery of Egypt. And that’s just the first 3 chapters of Exodus!

For the next 10 chapters of Exodus, the story plays out with many plagues and feasts and Moses declaring to Pharaoh to let the Israelite people go. Liberation is not easy. In fact even through all the plagues that were thrust upon Egypt, Pharaoh still does not let the Israelite people go. Pharaoh is stubborn, because power is stubborn. Power doesn’t relinquish its control over people too quickly. Pharaoh enjoys the power he has over the Israelite people, the power to control, the power to become a little god. If we are honest, there is something in all of us that identifies with Pharaoh. As scary as it is to admit, there’s something about having power over others that feeds our fragile egos. There is a climatic crescendo in the story when the Israelites end up crossing the Red Sea. The Israelites are filled with fear and apprehension and they even desire to stay under Egyptian authority because breaking the system of oppression is a scary and courageous thing to do. But

Moses reminds them to not be afraid, but instead to stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will accomplish. Because this God – our God – is always on the move delivering people from chains of oppression and addiction.

Choosing to subvert the system of injustice can be a scary thing. The Lord delivered Israel to freedom...the Lord is on the move to deliver us.

The nation of Israel journeyed into the wilderness of Sinai and it is here where laws such as the 10 Commandments are given. Laws, God's gracious gift to the nation of Israel that will help them live as a redeemed and free people. God faithfully dwells among God's people even when Israel was not so faithful to God. Remember the golden calf incident led by Aaron? Remember when the nation of Israel was waiting for Moses to come down the mountain and in their haste and anxiety they decided to make a golden calf and declared the calf as the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt. It is tempting to look at the Israelites and shame them for making such an idol. Yet we, like the Israelites, are burdened with anxiety and fear searching for idols to calm the inner waves. Be it the idol of consumption, wanting more than our portion, or maybe the idol of competition, trying to prove ourselves better than our neighbor – we too are like the Israelites.

Which leads us up to our passages for today. Moses is up on the mountain talking with and worshiping God. Moses makes his descent down

the mount with the two tablets of the covenant in his hands. As he comes down the mountain he is spotted by Aaron and the rest of the Israelites and the scriptures tell us because he had been talking with God the skin on his face was shining. Completely illumined. The Glory of God rested on him. The Israelites were scared to come near him because they thought that Moses looked like a god. He beheld God and he became like God. In Ancient Near Eastern imagery, radiance and illumination such as Moses's face shining represented the deities. Carol Meyers writes that God's glory, "was transferred to Moses when God speaks to him directly, it reflects God's glory and signifies Moses's authority." God's claim and authority rested upon Moses just as the case with Jesus in our gospel story today. Moses and Jesus both worshipped God intimately and were transfigured in glory. We become like that which we behold.

Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him up to the mountain to pray and worship God. It is here on this mountain where Jesus also had a radiant transfiguring experience. The glory of God revealed and rested upon Jesus. The same authority that was once placed on Moses as in our Exodus story was now being placed on Jesus. In fact, it is quite significant that at the time of Jesus's transfiguration Moses and Elijah also appeared. To a Jew - and let's remember Jesus was a Jew and so were Peter, John and James - to a Jew Moses was

representative of Israel's past. Everything that I just shared about Israelites' bondage to Egypt and their freedom and liberation found in God led by Moses is iconic to the Jew. Moses represents their beginning of their story. If Moses represents their beginning then Elijah represents their future. The prophet Elijah would one day turn peoples' hearts back to the covenant as talked about in Malachi 4:5-6. And it is here between Israel's past and future that the culmination of God's glory and plan for liberation and freedom is found in Jesus the Son of God. God's glorious radiance was revealed in Jesus. Jeffrey Tribble says, "We might say that in the Transfiguration event Jesus is clear about his mission...and it is this...he is to continue the redemptive work of God from Exodus through the End times." You see, Exodus and the Transfiguration of Jesus are not two separate stories but different parts of the same story of God loving on God's people and all the earth. And the story does not stop here but continues in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the authority that rested upon Jesus this Transfiguration day many, many years ago, we too are now to have the same hope. The Epistle reading states, "Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. And all of us, 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." We, like Moses, like

Jesus, are being transformed into the same spirit of glory one degree at a time. What we behold, we will become like. When our focus is on an idol in our life we become less than human. When we worship God we become more like the humans we are meant to be, one degree of glory to another.

The same glory of liberation that took Moses and the Israelites into subverting the powers that be, is the same glory that led Jesus to full powerful submission on a cross in order that the whole world maybe reconciled. This same glory working in Moses and Jesus is the same glory that is working in us to be people who subvert injustice, to be people who love and love and love. We meet God in worship and we are transfigured to look and live differently. What we behold, we become like. So what is that you behold? Maybe this is a good conversation for your drive home today. Maybe you are in bondage to the idol of consumption and you look at all the stuff in your house and realize that those things have you in captivity, and like Moses you must cross the Red Sea to be free from their oppressive hold. Maybe you have become so far removed from the food you eat that you don't know where it comes from anymore, thus you are disconnected from the good earth, and it's time to be transfigured in your relationship with the earth. Maybe you are in a seriously harmful relationship and it is time for you to connect with people to help bring about liberation from the bondage of harm you face in this relationship.

There are too many things vying for our attention - the question I have for you is, what are you becoming like? Because that will tell you what you are beholding. The good news, sisters and brothers, is that God is not done with us. God is revealing God's glory one degree at a time within in us - transfiguring us so that we may be people who subvert systems of injustice and people who help redeem the world we live in. We will fumble through this and God will remind us that "God is a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," God's glory revealed is liberating and we are invited to participate in it. May God be gracious to you and to me one degree of glory at a time.