

Sermon 7 February 2016 Luke 9:28-36-43 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 'Gloriously Alive'!

Prayer: God of grace and glory, may we see where to be your presence and bring true light in our world. Protect us from covering up or allowing your light in us to fade from our lives. Remind us that in you, we are gloriously alive. Amen

'Gloriously Alive' is what we are! There is no way to avoid our having to reflect today about **Glory**; God; **Moses**; **Jesus**; **Paul**; Paul's people and **us**. We are going to end this time of reflection by singing Grahame Kendrick's 'Shine, Jesus shine' and it is my prayer that some of the 'Light' that we sing about continue to sparkle for you in the coming week.

And as it sparks, may you remember that the glory of God is shining **in** you, because of Jesus, **for** the world. But our story today actually starts with Moses, *remember* him? As we heard from Luke, Moses was one of the two figures with Jesus that day – *long ago up the mountain*. Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery into freedom – and remember also that wasn't an easy job or journey and certainly was no pleasure ride in a theme-park! cv

Today we are remembering one event on that journey. When the people had set up camp at the base of Mt Sinai, Moses went up the mountain (again) to talk with God. (Hear the echo with Luke's story about Jesus???) Anyway Moses went up and one of the things he asked God at this time, was to be able to **see** God's 'glory'. So for Moses own protection, **God hid** Moses in a mountain rock-crack, went passed and allowed Moses to see his back. **This was the closest** anyone had ever before come to 'seeing' God' because **no one** could look on God's face and live, well, that was their tradition *anyway!*

BBrown-Taylor puts it this way:^{*1} 'God protected people from the full impact of deity, the same way Moses was protected. God shielded people, by hiding inside an envelope of light that was the only thing that people could see. Sometimes it looked to them like a pillar of cloud or fire, sometimes like a volcano, but no one ever mistook it for a *natural* phenomenon. It was brighter than anything on earth, like a doorway to some other world, and although the door remained closed most of the time, even shafts of light that got through the cracks, could **blind** anyone *silly* enough to look right at them. ->

The **light** was the sure sign of God's presence on earth, and for lack of a better word people began to call it **God's glory**. When they were worshipping together and the tent where they met was filled up with light, they said it was the glory of God...but no matter how strong it was, how palpable, God remained hidden inside of it. They **could not see** God. They could only see God's glory, *which was all most of them could bear.*"

This was the tradition Jesus, his disciples and Paul grew up with; **only** Moses 'saw' God, and the 'rubbed' off glory left Moses with a shining face, so bright people didn't want to look at him. But 1/ the light faded from Moses and 2/ his people were frightened of it so he covered-up, with a veil. So living with Jesus *as they did*, when the three disciples were with him that day – up the mountain and 'saw' the light in and around Jesus they 'knew' what they were looking at: **"God's Glory"** – in Jesus. They knew this was what the Moses story was all about – *almost* before they recognised who was talking to Jesus 'in the 'light-cloud', let alone the experience of the 'voice' and its message!

And Luke writes that as the scene unfolded before them, they became 'fully awake'. I can't help but wonder at the understatement – **surely?** Just as I am not surprised that they 'kept it to themselves'. Well, you would, wouldn't you? Take a moment to run through 'if this was you – not Peter'... How would you tell your family, friends, work colleagues???? I was – er praying today, up a mountain and ummm I 'saw' the glory of God, I saw Moses, Elijah, and God's voice spoke and ... ummm... Cv

*1 BBT Bread of Angels, Glory Doors

Jokes aside, we struggle with speaking about our experiences of the ‘divine’, the touch of the Lord, the presence of God in our lives... Oh, we all have them – often specific to our need and personal character, **but when that door opens** and the spark of light leaks through, words *might* fail, but we **know** and in that moment we are ‘fully awake’! And so it was with the disciples. Jesus it seems was completely at home with it all, including the incredible weight of the topic of conversation with Moses and Elijah. cV

Sharing some thoughts, you see in a moment we will turn to reflect on Paul’s use of this material in his battle to establish a credible Christian theology for the people of Corinth. But at this point we have Moses enveloped in the glory of God and it rubbing off on him but this experience includes fading, scaring, and the need to cover up; we have Jesus enveloped in light; and the disciples have an ecstatic – holy experience of the presence of God-in Jesus.

But the way they described it (obviously at some point they did talk about it!), the Glory of God was not so much around Jesus as **in him, shining out** – which is what Paul develops in his argument with the Corinthians. They ‘saw’ the glory of God – the light of God’s presence **in** Jesus face and shining from / off his clothes and later the ‘cloud’ envelops them.

God in Christ, God’s glory in Jesus shining for others to see **and** Jesus is completely ‘at home’ with it. More to wonder about is that the disciples are not afraid in this experience, Jesus does not need to ‘cover-up’, and there is nothing about the light of glory ‘fading’, it isn’t an issue as the cloud of God dissolves and they come down the mountain the next day. Do you wonder like me, if it is because Jesus carried the glory of God **within** him, God hidden in him – and to see Jesus is as much of God that we can take?

Whatever our reflections, down the mountain they came, straight into work, *as usual* for Jesus, including his frustrations recorded in our verse 41! **Our** mountain top experiences **however** powerful and meaningful, are not to keep us away from getting on with the ‘work’, to keep us apart from the world, to give us excuses to avoid working! Paul says to experience Jesus is to be set free from what has been, to be bearers of God’s glory in the world, to carry the light of God’s presence where ever we go, to shine with a light so bright, all around is caught in the transformation process needed for God’s glory to be seen in our world. Mountain top experiences are for us to go to work on / with – just like Jesus!

Paul puts it as: “17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” For Paul’s listeners he had been teaching about the change from the ‘old’ fully Jewish ways to ‘the way’ of following Jesus.

Our verses are a continuation of his battle with what *some* of the leaders in the church at Corinth were teaching **and** saying about him. So we get some of his ‘response’ and although he says ‘we’ he really means ‘me’: “1 Therefore, since through God's mercy (I) ~~we~~ have this ministry, (I) ~~we~~ do not lose heart. 2 Rather, (I) ~~we~~ have renounced secret and shameful ways; (I) ~~we~~ do not use deception, nor do (I) ~~we~~ distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly (I) ~~we~~ commend (myself) ~~ourselves~~ to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” It’s **probably safe** for us to assume what Paul thought his opponents were like with their secret, shameful, deceptive, and distorted ways!

All that is there – but it is not his point, he wants us to know that **unlike** the old ways which kept God and God’s glory covered up and fading, when we look at Jesus we see the true, full likeness of God – face to **face and live!** But what I believe is even more precious and so encouraging for us as we get on with the work ‘in the valley below’, is the thought that just as God *was hidden in Jesus*, and seen shining from him, so Paul promises **Jesus is ‘hidden’ in us** and shines from us. In our faithful discipleship and in our following of his ways, **we are in that transformation process** to be more and more like Jesus, ever increasing the glory of God – the presence of God through Jesus by the Spirit, we are alive in him – gloriously so. Amen

*1 BBT Bread of Angels, Glory Doors