

Matthew 17:1-9
The Face of God

“Don’t make me come back there!” How many of you heard that warning from come from the front seat? Anyone actually have mom or dad follow through on that threat? Just the thought of it created enough fear to settle things down, for a while at least.

Can you picture God saying, “Don’t make me come down there!” Earlier in Exodus the people had seen what happens when God comes down. Just before they left Egypt, God struck down the firstborn in every household, both people and animals. The only way some avoided this plague was to have the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorframe.

In our reading from Exodus Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel are invited up Mount Sinai to see God and eat with Him. Not all of them were real eager to go. They knew of God’s great creative power, but they also knew His destructive power. It is noted in the text, maybe with a measure of surprise, that *he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God and ate and drank*. On the mountain they saw God and survived.

God shows His face on two other mountains.

Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Peter thought it was a good thing to be there, but he, James and John also fell on their faces terrified. It was an amazing experience, but having God come down was also a scary thing. It was only when Jesus came and touched them and spoke to them that they were brave enough to lift up their heads a little and take a peek. And then they saw no one but Jesus.

Palm Sunday and confirmation are only a month away for our five eighth graders. In a sense, this day is Jesus’ confirmation day. At Jesus’ baptism God spoke introduced Him, *This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased*. Today, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we hear God confirm this truth. *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him*.

Fifteen hundred years earlier, Moses and the other guys in our text had witnessed God’s glorious presence. There God was confirming the covenant He was making with Israel in the giving of the Ten Commandments. The covenant was sealed with blood. *And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”* And three different times the Israelites said, “Yes, we will do everything you say” (19:8; 24:3, 7).

Except they didn’t. They said they would, but they didn’t. And so there was more blood – year after year sacrifices were offered on the altars of the tabernacle and temple.

The new covenant was also inaugurated with blood. This takes place on the third mountain, Mount Calvary. Without

blood, there is no forgiveness. And it is Jesus, the Christ who is Himself the sacrifice.

Unlike at Mount Sinai or on the Mount of Transfiguration, here God's face doesn't appear glorious; it is bloody. But that is the real glory of the Lord!

God's glory is to save us from our sins and raise us to eternal glory. That's what happened at the cross! That's what Mount Sinai pointed to. It's what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talked about at the Transfiguration.

It's what is delivered to us in the Divine Service. What Jesus earned with His suffering and death are delivered to you today as we gather for worship. It is here that we see Jesus' face shining on us.

We confess our sins because the Israelites are not the only ones who say, "Yes, we will do everything you say" and then don't do it. Then it is my face that you see, but it is Jesus speaking to forgive all your sin.

Jesus is here as He speaks through His word in the Scripture readings and sermon.

Jesus is here with His face shining on you as you receive His body and blood of the new covenant in His Supper.

The Divine Service concludes with Jesus' face shining on you. The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace." It is Jesus who today touches us and says, "Rise, and have no fear."

Following the glorious transfiguration, Jesus leaves the mountain and returns to His ministry in a fallen, sinful, troubled world. He is immediately confronted with a boy who is both sick and possessed and so many other results of sin. We leave church and enter again a sinful and decaying culture. The last thing we hear is the assurance that the Lord's face is shining on us to give us peace. We sing the closing hymn, then rise to leave with no fear. Amen.