Text: Exodus 34:-35; Luke 9:28-36

**The Bethel Pulpit**

**Pastor Margo R. Marten**

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 312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Please join me in a word of prayer: Holy, Holy Jesus Christ, be our Light…shine in our hearts…Holy, Holy, Holy God, shine in our darkness…Holy Lord of all, shine in our church, gathered today.

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We need a little sun – shine ! Every morning this week, I waited for the sun. I don’t know about you, but I am a person who LOVES winter. But right now, I’ve had enough of the gray and cloudy skies.

And I need some sunshine….(son-shine?)

SUNSHINE…OR Son-shine…? How shall we spell the SUN/SON part? Obviously, what I have been waiting for these many dreary weeks is the S-U-N---that big yellow ball up in a blue sky, warming the earth back to life…I need that SUN SHINE.

I think we also desperately need some S-O-N Shine…this Jesus, Son of God, to shine among us, here today, as we gather for worship. Today with Jesus up on the mountain, we DO have Son-shine: Jesus, Son of God…the face of Jesus, the clothes of Jesus, dazzling white, shining through the words of our text.

This is a crazy story: MATTHEW….MARK….LUKE….all tell the same story, with small variances. In our Exodus lesson, we just heard about Moses, as he encountered God in receiving the tablets with the Ten Commandments, his face, too, shone with a radiance so bright that he needed to wear a veil to subdue that brightness.

I can only say that I do not know anything about seeing a shining face on someone. How about you? Both of these texts remind us that there are aspects of God that are beyond our knowing, beyond our explaining and even far beyond our own faith experience. This holy God cannot be explained. This holy God also is totally outside of our own control: we cannot, simply by summoning God, make our own faces to shine.

And for those of us who have never seen such a manifestation, we can only accept the Biblical accounts of such experiences of the ‘glory of God’. We have no other words for it. We remember the story of Isaiah’s call in the 6th chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah, alone in the temple, and the pillars start to shake, these strange angel-characters, the seraphim and cherubim, some with 6 wings, are flying all around….and Isaiah realizes that he is in the direct presence of God…and he is filled with fear and trembling.

We also recall Saul on the road to Damascus, smitten by Jesus, transformed into Paul, transformed from persecuting Christians into an Apostle for Jesus Christ: an encounter that changed his life forever. And then there was Peter, astounded at the huge catch of fish after Jesus told him to cast his nets on the other side of the boat. Peter was confident that, after a night with no fish in their nets, that this was wasted effort. Then, a few hours later, when the boat was filled to over-flowing with fish, Peter acknowledged that Jesus had powers far beyond his own, and Peter knelt before Jesus in confession.

So we come to this Lukan account of Jesus’ transfiguration. Peter, James and John, as well, up on the mountain with Jesus, are described as being terrified. And you and I would be equally terrified, had we been there, seeing Moses and Elijah (long since dead) appear with Jesus in conversation about his last earthly days. Out of the cloud, they hear a voice: “This is my beloved Son, my Chosen; listen to him.”

Then Moses and Elijah disappear, and Jesus is alone with his three disciples…and they go back down the mountain, to go on with their lives. Changed forever after such an experience, Peter, James and John now have a new way of knowing who Jesus really is.

A few verses later in chapter 9 (verse 51) we read: Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. This verse tells us that the rest of the story in Luke will be shaped by Jesus’ clear intent to face all the persecution and suffering that lies ahead, not only for him but also for those who follow him and try to make sense out of following their leader to and through his death.

Jesus, Peter, James and John come down the mountain…and go on with the ordinariness of their lives. This holy Jesus, so totally other, now pays attention to the request from a father, who has a demon-possessed son with him, begging for healing…and Jesus continues his ministry of presence, casting out the demon so the father and son can return home, healthy and restored.

Our lives are not lived on mountain-top experiences. Like Jesus and the disciples, we have to come down from those ‘holy’ times with God, to our ordinary lives. Appropriately, for us, this story sets the stage for our Ash Wednesday observance, as we begin the Lenten Season this week. We, too, hear God’s claiming of Jesus as his Son and we also hear God telling us to ‘listen’ to Jesus. And Jesus continues to walk side by side with us.

One of our Lenten hymns includes a prayer for us:

How good Lord, to be here…yet we may not remain.

But since you bid us leave the mount, come with us to the plain.

“How Good, Lord, to be Here” ELW #315, st. 5

May God give us open eyes to watch for those ‘holy’ encounters with God, times when our faith, too, is renewed and gives more energy and courage to live faithfully as disciples with Jesus. Amen.

Peter, James and John, the only living human beings to experience this shining presence of Jesus…

Moses and Elijah, long since dead, showing up with Jesus…

JESUS…went up the mountain to pray…and while he was praying…

TERRIFIED !

ALL 3 OF OUR READINGS TODAY GIVES US

GLIMPSES OF SOMETHING

TOTALLY BEYOND OUR EXPERIENCE…

ALL OF THEM ABOUT THE HOLINESS OF GOD!

I DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT God’s holiness…