

Unveiled Faces

Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

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February 14, 2010

My two-and-a-half year-old sons are firmly entrenched in a singing phase in their lives. Their favorites lately are the ABC song, Old McDonald, and the theme to the Wonder Pets. It's not uncommon to wake up in the morning hearing Robert singing, "A B C D E F G."

One children's song they haven't learned yet, but I'm sure they will, is "If You're Happy and You Know It." You know how it goes...If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. If you're happy and you know it...then what? What happens? Your face will surely show it.

This is true for happiness, but it's also true for all of our other emotions. If you're angry and you know it, your face will surely show it. If you're sad and you know it... If you're excited and you know it... If you're frustrated and you know it... Our faces do surely show our emotions.

We often talk about people having a glow about them. Probably the most familiar time we talk about this is when a woman is pregnant. There's that glow. Since it's Valentine's Day today, I have to mention that glow we notice when someone is newly in love. There's a twinkle in their eye, a smile on their face that won't go away.

I noticed another time when people glow this past Friday night. Did you watch the Winter Olympics opening ceremony? It was amazing, wasn't it? The music, the pageantry, the technology, those whales that swam across the floor – it truly was a spectacle to behold. As the athletes came into the arena, during the parade of nations, did you notice their faces? They were simply glowing.

So what makes a face glow? There are many emotions that might cause our face to glow in each of the different situations we face. Sometimes it's a sense of pride or accomplishment, sometimes it's love. But as I think about it, there's one common element to a glowing face. There's a common core emotion when our faces glow, and I think that emotion is excitement. When we're excited about something, it's hard to hide. Just by looking at us, people can tell that there's something going on inside of us.

Has your faith ever caused your face to glow?

Maybe I should start with a slightly different question, and I'll take us back to the children's song. If you've experienced God and you know it...how will your face look? If you've been transformed by the love of God in your life, how will your face look? If you've witnessed God's presence and felt God's love in the community of Christians, how will your face look?

Our Old Testament reading this morning talked about the shining face of Moses. But how did it get that way? Maybe a little bit of background information would help. Moses was up on Mount Sinai for an extended period of time. If you don't know already, how long do you think



















he was up there? Yep! Forty days and forty nights. During that time, God gave Moses the covenant we know as the Ten Commandments. It was an intimate time of conversation between Moses and God, and a time of profound learning for Moses. During that time, the scripture says that Moses neither ate bread nor drank water, and he copied down God's commandments onto tablets.

When the time on the mountain was finished, Moses came down from Mount Sinai and rejoined the people of Israel. Now Moses didn't know that his appearance was different as a result of his experience of God. His face was shining in a way that it hadn't before his experience with God on the mountaintop, but he had no idea. The scripture tells us that when the Israelites saw Moses' shining face, they were afraid, but they came near Moses anyway to hear him speak. After he was done speaking with them and relaying God's commandments, Moses covered his face with a veil.

In our epistle text from 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul looks at the story of Moses and his veiled face, and has an interesting take on it. Paul imagines that veil that Moses wore, and he uses it as an analogy for the separation from God that some experience, especially as they try to be in relationship with God exclusively through following the law.

As Paul understands it, the covenant that Jesus brought in is different than the covenant of the law that God made through Moses. Paul considers Jesus' covenant a covenant of spirit, and, as Paul writes, where the spirit is, there is freedom. For Paul, trying to follow the covenant of the law brought only death, because it was impossible to follow all of the laws, but the covenant of spirit made possible through Jesus Christ brought life through the freedom it offers. Now here is where the veil comes in. For those who are following the covenant of the law exclusively, and not taking advantage of the covenant of spirit, it is like a veil is covering their faces even today. If they would turn to the Lord through the Spirit, Paul says, the veil would be taken away.

Paul also wrote that he believed the reason Moses wore the veil over his face was to hide the fading of the glow. Here's one of the key messages for me in this passage. Through Christ and the Spirit, we have unlimited access to God. God is always and everywhere present to us. We don't need to go to a mountaintop to experience God. As we grow in relationship with God, as we connect with the Spirit of God, we can begin to see God in ourselves as we look in the mirror. As we remove the metaphorical veil of trying to connect with God by only following the law, and rely instead on grace and faith, our unveiled faces will reflect more and more of the glory of God.

Now a life of faith isn't all about putting on a happy face. We're not always going to glow with excitement or love. There are times when life is extremely difficult. We experience pain and regret and sorrow. There are times when we mourn or we hurt. We face injustice and suffering. I submit, however, that a meaningful, growing relationship with God allows our faces to glow even in these times of trouble. It's a different kind of glow. It's a glow that isn't based on excitement. No, this glow is based on a sense of peace. The Bible describes it as a peace that passes understanding. When we have this kind of peace, a shalom that is found in relationship with God, I believe people can see it in our faces. Yes, it's a different kind of glow, but it's still



















there, and I've seen it in the faces of some people as they approach death, and in many other faces even through their tears.

One final note. Where does the glow come from? It comes from an experience of God. So how do we go about creating or maintaining our glowing faces? We put ourselves in positions and opportunities to experience God, and I think that's the invitation to Christian discipleship from this morning's texts. We are invited to experience God in such a way that our faces will glow. We are invited and encouraged to encounter God such that our faces will surely show that we have. The opportunities to experience God are abundant, but I'd like to focus on just one this morning.

On Wednesday, we begin the season of Lent. It's one of the holiest seasons of the Christian year. It's a time when we focus on our relationship with God, and I'd like to invite you to do just that during the 40 days of Lent. Spend some time in conversation with God like Moses did for those 40 days he was on Mount Sinai. There are Ash Wednesday services at 7:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. where you can begin your Lenten journey. I would encourage you to join us for one of those services.

I would also encourage you to take part in our Lenten study. We're offering several different times and places where you can encounter God with a small group of people. In this holy season, I encourage you to invest an extra hour to an hour and a half per week in an effort to build your relationship with God. It's an opportunity for learning, for reading the scriptures, for being in conversation with others who are on the same journey of faith you're travelling. If you don't already participate in a study or Sunday School class, I'd like to make a special invitation to you. Maybe this is the right opportunity for you to begin something new and make some new friends here at church.

The truth is, the glow will fade from our faces if we don't tend to it. So let us observe a holy Lent. Let us tend to our relationship with God. Let us keep the glow alive, so that others might see our unveiled faces and see our glow and know that God is alive in the world through us. May it be so. Amen.

















