

“And all were astounded at the greatness of God.”

This, after Jesus comes down from the mountain and casts a demon out of a young boy whose father asks for help. Jesus is off the mountain and back to work. And there is a growing sense among those who follow him, witnessing his healing miracles, that he is in fact God in the flesh.

That's what God has just revealed to Peter and John and James, off on a private hike with Jesus. Peter declared it a week before – “And who do you say that I am, Peter?” “You are the Messiah of God” – but believing it deeply is more than saying it. God was about to allow them to see it.

So, as Jesus is praying in that secluded place, his face begins to glow and an aura appears around him making his robe dazzling white.

The disciples knew the reference, of course. They knew that Moses' face had shone when he spoke with God on the mountain and came down with the 10 commandments written on tablets. And because it frightened the people to see him that way Moses covered his face with a veil in the presence of the people and took it off when he was in the presence of God.

Moses made no claim to being God, though. He was the man who had come closest to seeing God, if only the back of God. The veil showed that Moses was not God, nor God's Messiah. The glory was not his own, but God's.

I want to depart here for a moment to make a comment about the reading from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth because it needs to be put into context or it comes out sounding like a flat-out indictment of the Jewish faith. In fact, it has nothing whatever to say about the faith of modern-day Jews.

By this time Paul has planted the church of followers of Jesus Christ at Corinth and has left it to flourish on its own. But news has come to him that false teachers have gone there and are seeking to undo what he has taught about Jesus. They are the ones who, in his view, wear veils, whose minds are hardened, who will not see or reveal for others to see, the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

Paul is angry and hurt and yet continues to profess his unswerving faith in the divinity of Christ. “We do not lose heart,” - even in the face of opposition.

But returning to the gospel for this morning, there is Jesus standing on the mountain, ablaze with dazzling light, like an athlete who has just won the gold!

There he is on the highest step of the podium, in the middle, and on either side – Moses, the silver medal winner and Elijah the bronze, winners of the Law and the Prophets – all looking radiant as Jesus' own anthem is played – the voice of God saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him.”

It's a moment of glory. But it's fleeting. It doesn't last long.

Peter tries to make it last – let's build something to commemorate the place! But it's not the place that matters, it's the light, it's the sight of the glowing light, and the insight it brings, it's the glimpse of God revealing God's self to the closest of Jesus' disciples. Just a glimpse. Soon gone.

But it's a life-changing sight, the kind of thing they will think about long afterwards, remembering the beauty and the glory and the amazing nature of that revelation.

The Bible doesn't record it, but I wonder if they didn't poke each other and whisper wide-eyed on the way down that mountain, "Did you see what I saw?!"

We're all privileged to see the face of God from time to time, to get glimpses of God's glory that have the power to transform our faith. The Holy Spirit is still revealing God's glory to us.

Each of us has our own examples. Let me suggest a few of mine.

The beauty of nature can be so overpowering sometimes, and all we have to do is stop and take it in. I remember a particular morning in Vermont when I lived there, when Jack and I were first married. We lived in part of an old farmhouse in Montpelier, down a lane on about 100 acres of lovely property.

I was driving out the lane early one morning and there had been a hoar frost. The ground and every branch and twig of every tree were covered with white ice. Suddenly the sun came out from behind a cloud and lit up the most beautiful scene. Everything glistened. There was not one little leaf that was left untouched. God's paint brush had graced every surface and the lane was alive.

I stopped the car and sat there dumbstruck, but only for a few moments. This beauty was breathtaking but fleeting, there just for me, just for a moment. The glowing face of God. I know you've seen it, too.

Sometimes it's the radiant faces of those we love that reveal God to us. I remember how my sons looked as they said their marriage vows. And the beaming faces of their wonderful brides. Not to mention my beautiful grandbabies. These heaven-sent moments of glory are not earned, not like Olympic medals. They are pure gifts from God.

I had such an unearned gift early in my ministry as a priest. My husband Jack, then director of the Wooster Chorus, the touring choir of the College of Wooster in Ohio, had planned a spring tour to Texas and points west. They were scheduled to give a concert at Trinity Episcopal Church, Ft. Worth on a Saturday evening in March.

The rector of the parish, The Rev Fred Barber, upon hearing that the director's wife was a priest, asked if I would come and celebrate Eucharist on the Sunday morning following.

At that time women could not be ordained in the Diocese of Ft. Worth because the bishop was opposed to it. This continued until a year ago this month when Bishop Iker left the Episcopal Church and the diocese elected a new bishop.

At the time I was there women did not celebrate Eucharist either, by order of the bishop, except, of course, when invited by a maverick priest.

I went, knowing all this, but was not prepared for the impact my presence would have on the congregation at Trinity. There were tears from many – women and men – when I appeared in the procession wearing a chasuble. There was emotion in the faces of many as they received communion from me.

I was from a diocese where I had had no obstacle to presiding as a priest at the Lord's Table. I had done nothing to help the cause of the people of the Diocese of Ft Worth, nothing to deserve the privilege of being in that spot, yet I was given the grace of being the woman priest present that day.

It was truly a gift. But it was at the third service of the morning, a less formal one at which all those attending came up to stand around the altar for the Eucharistic prayer, that I saw the glowing face of God.

Children came up the steps in front of the altar and stood there in front of me as I said the Eucharistic Prayer. We sang the Sanctus and said the Lord's Prayer together. Then, as I raised the bread to break it, a little girl about 8 years old, who had been imitating my hand motions, raised her hands high in the air and broke an imaginary loaf of bread. "Christ, our Passover..." She was glowing.

Everyone dissolved in tears, including me. I felt so close to those followers of Jesus Christ whom I did not know, all because this little girl had demonstrated that she could see herself in the unrestricted offering of God's love to us all. It lasted a moment, but I will always remember it. The face of God revealed through her face.

Just as the disciples had a reference for understanding what they saw, as Jesus began to shine before them, and that reference was the face of Moses, so we have this reference, this transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop, to remind us that the radiance we see in the face of a little girl looking with hope to the future, is the love of God being revealed to us.

Jesus, in human flesh, was able to reveal God to us and so all human flesh can be in on it.

I know that you have your own stories of God's glory revealed, of seeing God shine before you. Some of you have already told them to me and I hope there will be more.

I hope that you sometimes experience glimpses of God's glory as you worship here, whether it's by hearing Holy Scripture read, or singing a hymn, or watching our children come into the church together, or when you receive the sacrament of Holy Communion.

For me God is revealed every time I have the privilege of serving you the bread, which is the Body of Christ.

“And all were astounded,” the gospel tells us, “at the greatness of God.”

Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria