

After Meeting Glory – Part A

Scripture: Exodus 24:12 – 18

March 2nd, 2025

Today is the day that the church remembers the transfiguration of Jesus. We remember how Jesus went up on the mountain with his closest disciples. We remember how Jesus' face shone with the glory of the Lord. We remember how the disciples knew just enough that they became afraid. But today, I would like to look at the story of Moses on Mount Sinai. It has many similarities to Jesus' mountaintop experience.

God calls Moses to come up the mountain, and Moses, being a good and responsible leader of his people, delegates his leadership duty of the people to Aaron and Hur. Moses tells the people that Aaron and Hur will hear their disputes while Moses is up the mountain.

Up Moses goes, and the glory of the Lord settled on the mountain. A cloud covered the mountain for six days. Moses waited at his base camp for these six days, and then on the seventh day, God calls Moses from the cloud. Moses goes into the cloud and he beholds the glory of the Lord.

We have no real description of what Moses sees, but the people at the foot of the mountain see a devouring fire. Moses stays in the fire with the glory of the Lord for 40 days (a long time).

This is where our scripture story ends, but let us hear the rest of the story. Let us hear about what comes after meeting glory.

While Moses has been there for 40 days and nights, the people begin to wonder if he will ever return. So the people do as Moses had told them, and they take their concerns to Aaron and

Hur. The people ask the new representatives of God's presence about Moses.

They become fearful, like the disciples did on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. They wish to make a new symbol of their God so that their fears may be relieved. So Aaron gathers up all the gold they took with them from Egypt, and Aaron cast for them a golden calf. Aaron gives the people what they want – a new graven image of God. Aaron gives them something to calm their fears, and the people make offerings before it, so they break their covenant with God. But their minds are at ease because they think Moses has left them alone in the wilderness. Their fears have overwhelmed them. They create a new image to calm their fears.

I believe we have become fearful. Whenever another executive order comes out, our fear grows. Whenever another tweet goes out, our fear increases!

We, like the Israelite people and the disciples on the mountain, have become fearful, and we want our golden calf made. So what do we want to make? What new symbol of God are we creating? What new graven image are we looking for? What will we build to calm our fears?

Some people have put their trust in a man that they believe has all the answers. They have put their trust in a man who says he has never done a wrong thing. This man has become their golden calf!

You know what happens next, if you have ever watched Charlton Heston enact the wrath of God in his movie. Moses storms down the mountain and sees the people worshipping before the golden calf. Moses shatters the tablets, written by God's own hand, that he has brought down the mountain. Moses breaks the tablets that God had given him to mark the covenant with God.

Moses calls out – *‘Whoever is on the Lord’s side, come to me!’* The Levites respond and Moses tells them to draw their swords and slaughter all the idolaters. They are told to ordain themselves to the priesthood in the blood of their kinfolks!

Boy, I do not like this part of the story. Moses orders the priest to kill some of the people of God who have mistakenly worshiped the golden calf. After meeting glory, many people are killed!

I wonder what we will do to calm our fears. Will we break our long-standing history of being a country who welcomes the refugee? Will we succumb to our fears and sit aside Jesus’ teaching of love and compassion?

For those of us who put trust in God, or long to put trust in God, it can be tempting to ignore this part of the story. We might tell this story of the glory of God, while trying to forget what happens after meeting glory. But I think we have got to remember this story, especially on Transfiguration Sunday. This story of Moses and his people can guide us.

The lesson of Mt. Sinai is not that we should take vengeance on idolaters, as if God needs us to execute judgment for him. But the lesson of Mt. Sinai is that God keeps faith, even with the faithless. Let me repeat that – God keeps faith, even with the faithless.

God keeps faith with those who worshiped a golden calf, and God keeps faith with those of us who worship personal security, individual wealth, social status, or political power.

The lesson of Mt. Sinai is that God keeps faith not only with those we despise, but also with us!

To say that God keeps faith with us does not mean that God does not care what we do. It does not mean that anything goes. After all, God's keeping faith with the Israelites involved giving again the tablets of the Law that Moses had destroyed. God loves us too much to leave us to our own devices.

Let us pray:

Go forth and serve in the foundation of our faith, knowing the honor and glory of God, because we live in the afterglow of the glory of God through Jesus Christ. May the peace of God be with all of you, now and forever. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

After Meeting Glory – Part B

Scripture: Exodus 32:7 – 14

March 9th, 2025

On this first Sunday of Lent let us look closer at the continuation of the story of Moses and his encounter with glory on Mt. Sinai.

When God hears the children of Israel worshipping before the golden calf, God gets furious! God tells Moses to go down the mountain not to free the people like Moses did in Egypt but to destroy them. God says – ‘*Leave me alone! Let my fury burn and devour them!*’ God wants to wipe out the children of Israel and start a new covenant people from Moses and his descendents.

In scripture, this moment is the moment in which God is the angriest at anyone. In this case it is his beloved people of Israel!

Moses pleads with God on behalf of Israel. Moses tries every kind of persuasive appeal he can. Moses tries this – *Why should the Egyptian say – God had an evil plan to take the people out and kill them in the mountains and so wipe them off the earth.* Moses tries to sway God from his anger by telling God that this would embolden the Egyptians.

And the clincher that Moses tells God about the people is this – *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; your servants whom you yourself promised that you would make their descendents as many as the stars in the sky.* Moses even gives God his own words to help save the people of Israel.

After all this pleading, we have one of the most remarkable passages in the Bible – Exodus 32:14 – *So the Lord changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people.*

This is not because the people apologized.

This is not because the people turned away from the golden calf.

And this is not because God thinks they will do better in the future.

It has nothing to do with who they are or what they do. It has everything to do with who God is! God is a faithful God and what does a faithful God do – keep his promises!

How often do we do something that only a faithful God will forgive us for? How often do we receive forgiveness not because we apologize; not because we turned away from our own idols; and not because God thinks we will do better in the future. It has nothing to do with who we are or what we do. It has everything to do with who God is! God is a faithful God and what does a faithful God do – keep his promises!

This is critical to remember – Before Moses takes one step down the mountain, God has forgiven the people. God has chosen to keep the covenant that the people tried to break. Because of God's own character, God has decided not to destroy them.

This is critical for us to remember – Before we take one step down a terrible path, God has forgiven us. God has chosen to keep the covenant that He has made through His Son, Jesus even though we try to break it. Because of God's own character, God has decided not to destroy us.

If you want to see the full glory of the Lord, it is here (point to the table)

The fullness of God's glory comes not in beautiful blue skies or on royal thrones or in all consuming fire – the glory of God; the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God who gave us Jesus Christ is manifested in this moment on Mt. Sinai when God decides not to destroy the people but to take into God's own self the cost of their chasing after idols. God decided to keep faith with a people who do not keep faith with God.

The fullness of God's glory comes to us in Jesus Christ who went to the cross for our sins. It is at that moment when God decided not to destroy the people but to take into God's own self the cost of his one and only Son's life. God decided to keep faith with us who do not keep faith with God.

Moses pleads for that glory. Moses prays for it. But he cannot live with it. When Moses goes down the mountain, when Moses sees the people worshipping the golden calf, Moses becomes hot with anger. No one can talk him out of it. And so Moses calls for blood.

We must not miss the irony here. Moses pleaded for the people, God had forgiven them just as Moses had begged God to do – and then Moses slaughtered people in just the way that he asked God not to do.

In this violence Moses did what God had decided not to do. Moses let his own decision trump God's decision. Moses shattered the tablets that were a sign of the covenant God had decided to keep.

In making this decision that was God's to make and taking action that was God's to take; Moses put himself in the place of God. And here is the irony – in putting himself in the place of God, Moses replaces God with something less than God. This is Moses idolatry. In killing the people for worshipping the golden calf, Moses becomes an idolater himself!

In live, it is never the case that we should not go up the mountain, lest God demand violence of us. The lesson of Mt. Sinai is that God keeps faith even with the faithless – us!

After meeting the glory of God who keeps faith with the faithless, we should not come down the mountain to avenge a God who has renounced revenge. We should rather come down the mountain full of confidence in God's love for the very people who have betrayed God, even ourselves!

*After meeting glory, we should be moved to repent of our idols that God has already forgiven.

*After meeting glory, we should come down the mountain ready to engage in the difficult discipleship of loving the people God has decided to love.

*After meeting glory, we should prepare to journey with Jesus during this season of Lent to the cross that is the price of this love. Let us begin Lent after meeting glory to make our way to the empty tomb for it is there that we will find our salvation.

Let us pray:

O God after meeting your glory in Jesus Christ, let us, your people, always go up the mountain of our faith so that we may witness your glory; And let us come down the mountain of our faith so that we may serve you better because you are a faithful God to the faithless – us. AMEN.