

FACE TIME WITH JESUS
Sermon, February 27, 2022
Transfiguration Sunday
Texts: Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9:28-36, II Peter 1:16-19

As read prior to the Call to Worship this morning, Peter writes, *"We are eyewitnesses of the majesty of Jesus Christ,"* and then he specifically refers to the event recorded in our Gospel reading. On this scene recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and alluded to in John (*when he wrote in John 1 "we have seen his glory"*), Jesus' **face** changed, other accounts tell us it "shone like the sun," and they saw His face like they never saw it before. His clothes "became as white as a flash of lightning," (*other Gospel accounts have it "as white as the light"*) and Moses and Elijah appeared there with Him, and we are told in Luke's account that the three were talking about what will be happening in the days ahead. (*I've mentioned this on past Transfiguration Sundays, that in a way, this scene is a great pictorial summary of the whole Bible ... Moses representing the Torah, the Law; Elijah representing the Prophets; and both conversing with Jesus in Whom and by Whom the Law and the Prophets find their complete fulfillment ... but that's another much longer sermon. Another easily missed, but significant, detail: It appears Moses finally made it to the Promised Land, which he wasn't allowed to enter in his lifetime; see Deut. 32:48-52.*) And then a cloud enveloped the disciples, and God's voice sounded from the cloud and said, **"This is my Son. Listen to Him!"**

In our lesson from the Old Testament, we read of another face changing occurrence. Moses has been on Mount Sinai having "Face Time" with God; he has been in the presence of God where he was given the Ten Commandments, the *"two tablets of the Testimony."* We are told that when Moses descended from the mountain *"... with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD."* After spending time in the presence of God, the face of Moses changed; we are told his face was so aglow with the *reflected* glory of God that his older brother Aaron and all the rest of the Israelites were afraid of him and would not draw near; Moses had to call to them and coax them to come to him. After Moses gave them the commands he had just received from God, he then put a veil over his face to cover the dazzling brilliance. And the text concludes by telling us that whenever Moses entered God's presence, he removed the veil. Then he would come out to tell the Israelites what had been commanded, face aglow with the reflected glory and authority of God, and you can be sure they listened! (*There's another sermon in itself here, but when someone genuinely and intentionally spends time in the presence of God, it's going to show in that person's face. It radiates a kind of subtle sincerity and credibility, even authority. On a related note, for better or worse, how and when we spend our time WILL show in our faces.*)

The Time with the Children I had planned involved thinking about how the Bible might be thought of as God's Facebook profile (*or, perhaps more accurately, FAITHbook*)... its pages reveal God to us. Think about the Bible as God's FaithBook profile ... read it often, spend time looking into the divine "posts" that tell you of God's activities, God's likes, His passions, His interests, what He has done and is doing. In fact, join His Faithbook community; send a "friend" request to God asking Him to reveal more of His "profile" to you ... more accurately, respond to God's friend request to you, for He has already expressed His "friend request" to all in that He loved us so much He sent His only Son into this world ... but we have to respond and accept His expressed invitation in Jesus Christ. Spend time in Faith Book; it'll be time well spent; and as you do so ALSO be sure to spend intentional Face TIME with God in prayer, asking Him to help you to better understand His timeline, His posts, His likes, His hopes for your present and future.

Just as something of an aside, a quick "disclaimer" of sorts about Facebook: in my experience I quickly discovered, how, like all online technology, it has its plus and negative sides ... for one thing, it can be a tremendous time waster, and it also has its potentially dark and manipulative and addictive and frankly dangerous and cruel and even victimizing sides. But it can be a remarkably helpful means of communication and a great venue for reestablishing contact with long ago friends. As with all modern technology, it needs to be used with caution, discipline and care. A few quick few rules of thumb for social media: Be careful about what you post and read. Don't say anything you wouldn't say in a face to face encounter with another; exercise the Facebook version of the Golden Rule ... don't post about others what you wouldn't want them to post about you. As in all things, let love be your prime motivation; be loving, be affirming, be encouraging, be kind, be thoughtful. Don't allow the relative "protection" of a computer screen to foster the rather nasty, rude and/or unkind behavior it tends to foster; I've seen too many things posted that would probably never have been said face-to-face to flesh and blood people. There have been and continue to be too many cases where rudeness, hazing and outright cruelty has de-

faced Facebook pages (*which also, by the way, defaces the very real lives of those who own the pages*). And don't let virtual communication become a substitute for face to face encounter and communication. We need to have face time. Making face time with friends, family, and neighbors takes away the electronic filters that hide and obscure. It is face time that makes us vulnerable, that makes us real, that makes us more polite, that makes us more human. I like how one author rather concisely defined "manners" – "*At their most fundamental level, manners amount to an acknowledgement that other humans exist.*" Mannerly people act with loving respect of, and mannerly consideration for, the very real existence of others, and we tend to develop better manners when we spend time face to face with real people, rather than computer screens. And again, spend face time with God, don't just read about Him; when you spend time in the presence of the Holy, you can't help but be changed for the better.

As mentioned earlier, Peter reiterates emphatically, "*We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.*" Peter writes this letter knowing that his time on earth was short and that his readers in Rome were about to face many dark difficulties and very real dangers in the persecution to come. In the midst of this reality, Peter reminds them, our faith in Jesus Christ is not grounded on myths or clever stories; it's *real!* Our faith is sure and certain and factual and historical. And Peter refers specifically to this scene from the Gospels, the Transfiguration, which seems to have been a defining moment for these three disciples. I'm sure the vivid memory of this experience kept them going through some very dark times. In this moment on the Mount, Jesus confirmed Peter's confession made eight days earlier, thus erasing any remaining doubt as to who He might be. He also confirmed He would have to go by way of the Cross, that there will be betrayal and rejection and suffering and difficulty and death when they go back down the mountain and head on to Jerusalem, but on the other side of all this He would be raised in eternal life and glory. Yes, He was going to suffer; but Yes, all will be well! I think Jesus took Peter, James and John up onto the mountain with Him because He wanted to give them something to remember and to hold onto when times got tough.

And things will always get tough in the rough and tumble of living in a fallen world ... there will be betrayals, there will be sufferings, there will be disappointments and failings. A quote I used in a previous Ash Wednesday service (*unfortunately, I don't have the quote source*) sums it up well, "*There is no Eden without a serpent.*" There's always going to be something causing things to go wrong, no matter how "perfect" the paradise on earth may seem. But on that mountain these disciples are given ultimate Face Time with Jesus in real time; they are given a glimpse into how it will all turn out in glory. Jesus wanted to assure them He knew what He was doing. Moses and Elijah are there to confirm it. By being given this intense experience they can now see that no matter what difficulties they will face, the story will turn out well. Another quick point I've made on past Transfiguration Sundays: Glorious as the transfiguration experience was, I think it's significant to note that God didn't speak during it; He spoke *afterwards*. He spoke from the cloudy haze which followed the experience. It was in the *cloud* the disciples heard the voice of God. While they were covered in cloud, disorientated, unable to see clearly, God spoke to them and told them to "*LISTEN TO JESUS.*" More often than not, the cloudy times are where God is encountered. They are where genuine faith takes root, where the intensity of previous religious "mountaintop" experience takes on real meaning ... and where we learn, really learn, to listen to Jesus.

You know, when Peter witnessed this Transfiguration, he wanted to set up dwellings and stay there. It seems he just wanted to dwell in perpetual spiritual clarity. But he could not do so. Jesus wouldn't let him. He had to go back down the mountain. They all had to go back down the mountain, back to the valleys and plains of life and work. But they descended inspired with a quiet knowledge and utter confidence in their hearts that the Hope is real. Spiritual experiences can and do come to us, times we catch glimpses of heaven, when we "see" the glory of God. Wonderful and joyful as these moments are, they do not last, do they? We'd love to hang onto them, we'd love to dwell in that perpetual spiritual clarity, but Jesus won't let us, either. The transience of these moments is the pattern of Transfiguration: a glimpse of glory ... followed by a return to the cloudy paths of discipleship. God gives us a taste of what IS; then God says, "*Enjoy this. Now go home. Get back to work. And keep listening to Jesus*"

We always hope you receive a blessing from our worship services, that the music and the prayers and the fellowship offered here bring you closer to God than you have ever been before, that you may get a glimpse of glory and experience a little Face Time with the Almighty in this community of His friends. But no offense, we don't want you to stay here. There are people out there who need your love and your witness of faith as you listen to and follow Jesus; they need to know the vision of Christ you hopefully have experienced here ... as part of God's Faith Book community.