

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Transfiguration
Exodus 34:29-35
January 21st, 2018

We have mentioned before that the Christian faith and life is a paradox... two seemingly contradictory things that come together to form one great truth. Jesus dies in order that we might live. We are set free and subject to none in Christ by grace, yet at the same time we are completely servants of God and to our fellow man. These seem like opposites. Yet, instead, they both identify what the Christian life is all about.

Here is another paradox. This one is the topic for this morning's sermon. God hides Himself in order to reveal Himself to you. How is that possible? Something like that may seem more like a brain teaser rather than a simplified way to understand the work of God. But it really isn't difficult to understand. Let's take a look into the Scriptures and you will see. It's not as difficult to understand as it might seem. Also, when it is explained, it becomes all the more clear how God has chosen to work in this world of ours and why He has chosen to work in this way.

First, let's go back to last Sunday's Old Testament reading. It's just one chapter before the appointed Old Testament text for today. In it, God and Moses were talking. God promises that He will be with Moses and all of Israel as they make their way through the desert into the Holy Land. Moses says to God, "Show me your glory." In other words, I want to see all of you God. I want to revel in all that you are. I want to know you and understand you completely. But God says, "You can't. You can't handle it. It's too much for you. I know you may not understand that but, trust me, it would kill you."

So, God puts Moses in the cleft of the rock, puts His hand over him and shows him just his backside. That's all he could handle. God hides Himself from Moses in order to reveal Himself to him.

They talk on the top of the mountain for a while and then it's time for Moses to go down to his people. What he doesn't realize is that his encounter with God has changed his appearance. The small amount of God's glory has completely changed the face of Moses. He looks different. He looks shiny. He is glowing. In other words, He is revealing a part of God's glory in His face. It's as if God's glory was so intense that the face of Moses shines brightly with God's radiance. Almost like a supercharged sunburn. The people see God in the face of Moses. It's so intense that Moses must "hide" his face, so that they can see his face. In other words, if they are going to look at Moses, Moses must cover himself.

Let's take this one step further in our Gospel text for today and then we will begin to see how the Lord works this way for you and me today. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John got to see Jesus in a way no other has seen Him before. He was bright and shiny. It says that "*His face shown like the sun and his clothes became white as light.*" Now, Peter, James and John see this. This is amazing. And, the Father comes in a bright cloud. The disciples put their face down – they were terrified. And here is the interesting part. Jesus says, "*Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.*"

"Are you kidding? You want me to keep what I just saw "hidden" from everyone. I want others to see your glory, Lord. I want you to be revealed and not hidden." However, in order for the best part of God to be revealed... His death on a cross and His resurrection on Easter, certain things needed to remain "hidden" so that God can be found in the place where He wants to be found.

God "hides" so that He might be "revealed" to us. A face hidden with a veil so that they can look at Moses. A close encounter with God's glory on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration and then Jesus imploring to the disciples to "hide" what was seen so that the best part of what I will do will be "revealed" as true glory to them. Do you see how God hides so that He can reveal Himself in the Bible?

What about today? How does this work? I know how we want it to work. We want God to reveal Himself in the ways we want Him to be seen. We want God to rise up and crush our enemies. "Reveal yourself as God, oh Lord, and obliterate those who are unjust. Take them down. Don't let them live," we might say. We want God to reveal Himself by going directly to the source of our pain, our discomfort or our disease, like a superhero who swoops in and saves the day. We want God to act now... that's how we want Him to reveal Himself. That's what we want to see. "Make yourself known, God. Prove yourself to me. Prove yourself to those who do not know you. If you would just reveal yourself, everything would be so much better."

Or would they? If God came and immediately obliterated His enemies, who would be included? Would you be included? And if not, why not? Your sins show yourself as an enemy of God's Word. You oppose Him when you sin. You deserve God's full revealed wrath. What about your afflictions? Do they not have purpose? Do they not reveal the service of others? Do they never guide you back to His loving arms? Do they never cause you to rely on the hope of true life and reveal to us which life really is the most important... the one awaiting us in heaven?

Beloved, God reveals Himself by hiding today. God "hides" Himself in water combined with the Word in Holy Baptism. He hides Himself in the bread and wine in Holy Communion. He does this so that we know where to find Him. These simple things are not meant to be glorious and eye-catching. No, they are meant to demonstrate for us that God has chosen to make Himself known exactly where He promises to do so. We can count on it.

He chooses these simple means so that we don't have to be confused about where to find God. We can always find Him exactly where He says He is. For this reason God "hides" Himself so that He can "reveal" Himself to you. You know right where He is. You don't have to be confused about it.

I know we would love to have the mountain top experiences of Moses, Peter, James and John so we could see the big stuff like them. I know we think that if God would just reveal Himself like this, everyone would believe in Him and things would be so much better. Not true. And God knows this. People would find ways to explain how clouds and people become so bright and shiny. Those explanations wouldn't include the supernatural. Besides, who has been saved by a gleaming face in the Old Testament or a shiny on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration? Neither of those things saved anyone.

No, that man on the Mount had to come down and do the work of dying on the cross for salvation. Life was hidden in death on the cross of Calvary. Salvation is revealed, not in God's glorious hour, but rather in His weakest most unglorified moment. Go to the cross, and in that instrument of death we find life hidden within it. We see where God truly reveals Himself and, beloved, we have no need to look to the mountain tops to find Him. No, look where He promises to make Himself known to you... where He hides and reveals. Look at the Word. Here is where He speaks to you. Look at baptism. Here is where He comes to you and makes you His very own. Look at the Holy Supper. Here is where He unites you with His grace and builds the fellowship of believers.

It's a paradox for life. God hides so that He may reveal. His glory may be muted (so to speak) by water, bread and wine, but His gifts never are. He comes, He strengthens and He reveals His love and life to you through these means. And they are here. That's why a place like this is so important for you and so important for your neighbor. This is the place to see God reveal Himself to you. He chooses it for a purpose... to give you a life undeserved. So that you may see and know Him where He is to be found. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.