

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
February 10, 2013**

**Exodus 34:29-35**

**The Glory of the Covenants**

- 1. The Glory of the 1<sup>st</sup> Covenant**
- 2. The Glory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Covenant**

**Hymns: Jesus, Take Us to the Mountain – 95 – 281,  
Closing: Glorify Thy Name**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*<sup>29</sup> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai 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. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. <sup>32</sup> Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai*

*<sup>33</sup> When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. <sup>34</sup> But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup> they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD. (EXODUS 34:29-35)*

The first time had not gone so well. In fact, the first time that Moses went up onto the mountain to gather the covenant could only be described as disastrous. Moses had gone alone to the top of the mountain amidst thunder and lightning and none of the people were quite sure of what was happening. When hours turned into days and days turned into weeks, the people grew restless, the people grew fearful, and then, the people turned to golden calves. They assumed that the man who had led them out of Egypt was no longer around. They assumed that the God who he had told them about was powerless and empty. And so, they ate, they drank, they indulged in revelry, all while God was giving a covenant full of promises to their leader.

When Moses returned and saw what was happening, he was filled with a righteous anger. These people didn't deserve the covenant that God had just written onto two stone tablets. So Moses threw them down and destroyed them. He melted the calves of gold and put it in the water for the rebellious Israelites to drink. He gathered the Levites and sent them out among the people wielding swords that brought the swift punishment of death. Those who survived the sword were struck by a severe plague, a punishment from the Lord. Yes, the first time that Moses had gone up to the mountain of the Lord, it had not gone so well.

So what would happen now? Once again, Moses was called by God Almighty to come before him on the mountain. Since that fateful first trip, attitudes had seemed to change among the Israelite people. But this would certainly be the test. What would happen when the leader left? What would happen if Moses again disappeared for 40 days and nights? What would happen when Moses returned? As we look to Scripture this morning, we see that while that first trip up the mountain was filled with disappointment, this second trip would be defined by glory.

Once again, Moses was enveloped up on that mountain by clouds of thunder. Once again, Moses was gone for 40 days and 40 nights. Once again, Moses received from God the covenant of the Law. So much of what happened up on the mountain was the same, but when Moses returned, that is when things were different. He returned to a people that were waiting eagerly for him. They all stood in anticipation, but there is no way they could be prepared for what they would see.

When Moses returned after his time spent with God, his face was radiant, shining like the sun, and that glowing face caused the people to run in fear. All those people who were eager for his return now could not get away from Moses fast enough. What could cause such a reaction? It had nothing to do with Moses and everything to do with the One who sent him.

Even before Moses said a word, these people knew that they could not stand before this glory that surely came from the Lord. This was the glory of a perfect God. These peoples' consciences told them that they could not endure such perfect glory. These people knew that whatever Moses was about to give them from God, they could not measure up to it, and so they ran away as sinners full of fear. They ran away from God just as Adam and Eve did long ago when God came looking for them in the garden. They ran away from God just as you

and I and everyone else in this world naturally wants to do. Even without the Law of God, our consciences tell us that we have no right to stand before God Almighty; our consciences tell us that we have no desire to do so. And so it makes all the sense in the world that these people would run, because that is exactly what we would do.

But that divine fear that the Israelites felt wasn't the end game, God's purpose had not yet been achieved, so Moses called the people back. He gathered them together and he made them look at the glory of God that was reflecting off his face, he made them listen as he gave God's glorious covenant to them. He made them think about the words, "***Be perfect as I the LORD your God am perfect.***" He made them listen to every one of God's glorious commandments and think about the terrible ways in which they had broken them. He wanted them to stand there, seeing God's glory, and he wanted them to know that they deserved nothing but death. And when they fully understood that they could never live in the presence of God's glory, he then wanted them to ask a question. "Why aren't we dead, yet?" "Here we are, sinners standing and seeing God's glory, so why are we still alive?"

And still today, God calls to us, who by nature want to run as far away as we can from him. He calls us to come and hear the message of his Word. And there in the message of the Law, God wants us to see the incomparable glory that is seen in his perfection. Through his Law, he calls every one of us to look at the 10 commandments and think about the very specific and ugly ways that we fall short of his perfect glory. He wants to affirm the truth that our consciences can only begin to uncover: We cannot stand before God; we deserve to die! And when you and I are led by God's Word to understand that we could never live in the presence of God's glory, then he wants us to ask a question as we sit here in God's house, "Why aren't we dead, yet?" Though we show each and every day that we can't measure up, why are we allowed to continue on day after day?

And when sinners ask that question, the full glory of the Law is seen. God's covenant of the Law has served its glorious purpose when it has led all who hear it to the point where they know what they deserve and they know what they need. And when that message is delivered, the glory of the Law fades away as Paul says in Corinthians. Its glory fades away because though the Law opens up a gaping need in our lives, it does not provide us with the answer. It is not a covenant that lasts. It

is not a covenant that is meant to. This glorious covenant of the Law is to lead us to the second covenant from God, and that is the Gospel.

The glorious covenant of the Old Testament gives way to an even more glorious covenant that is founded not on laws, but in Christ. This new covenant does not force us to look at what we have done, but instead it has us focus on what has been done for us. This second covenant does not have a glory that fades away, but it has a glory that lasts. This new covenant tells us exactly why we can stand here in the presence of God and live. And this Transfiguration Sunday gives us an opportunity to catch a glimpse of that glory of the new covenant.

Once again, this revealing of God's glorious covenant takes us to the top of a mountain. There, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we find Peter, James, and John, as they witnessed the glory of God's covenant of the Gospel. And through this account, we see just how different this second covenant is. The glory of this new covenant did not shine forth through laws written on stone, instead it beamed forth in Jesus Christ, God's one and only who came to this earth. Instead of hearing laws that promised death, they heard a booming voice of approval from God himself. Though these men stood and stared at the glory of God with a reverent fear, they had no thought to run and hide like the Israelites had done so long ago. As they basked in the glory of God's gospel covenant, they said instead, "***It is good, Lord, to be here!***" They wanted to remain there in the presence of the glory of God. Everything had changed!

And this glory seen on the Mount of Transfiguration is meant to change how we look at things as well. In the coming weeks of Lent, we will be called to watch as our Savior suffers. We will be called to consider how our sins were the direct cause of that punishment. Our hearts will fill with grief; our eyes will well with tears as we journey to Calvary. But the darkness of our Lenten journey is short-lived. Through it all, we hold onto the glory that we have seen on this day. It is our beacon of hope when Satan would cause us to despair. It is our source of confidence when he would have us doubt. This glory in Christ that we have seen today lights the way as we go to the cross.

And we look forward to the day seven Sundays from now, when we will see the full glory of God's Gospel covenant as it bursts forth from a tomb that could not contain it. We look eagerly to that day, because it gives the assurance that the

answer that is found in Christ, the glory that is found in him can never fade away. In Christ, we have a lasting covenant from God, a covenant that does everything for us, a covenant with a glory that does not fade.

Because of that, we can bask in the glory of this covenant with no fear. We don't have to run from God, as if we can't see his glory. We don't have to wonder if we can stand in his presence. Through the covenant of Christ, we know exactly why we can stand before God. Why don't we die? We don't die because Christ did. He met the demands in our place. That is the glory of the Gospel.

And may the glory of God's covenants fill us with confidence as we go through life. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:12 that those who have such a hope (a lasting hope that is founded in Christ) can be very bold. We can be bold in the way that we stand before God. We can be bold in the way that we stand up to Satan. Our boldness does not come from a source that will disappear. It is founded in a glorious God, whose glorious covenants last forever.

On the mountains of the Lord, we see the glory of his covenants. On Mt. Sinai, we see the glory of the Law. It is a message that shows us our sin. But that covenant only gives way to the glory of the covenant that we see on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is a covenant with glory that lasts. Hold onto that glory in the weeks ahead. Hold onto that glory forever. Amen.