Worship Resources for February 10th—Transfiguration Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

As we end the season after the Epiphany and prepare to begin the journey of Lent, this Sunday in the Revised Common Lectionary marks the change, the transformation that is taking place within us, within our worship life and in our liturgical calendar.

We begin with Exodus 34, in which Moses’ face shines so brightly he has to wear a veil. Moses’ face shines because of his encounter with God, with the tablets of the covenant in his hands, but at first he does not know that his face is shining. In today’s world, our faith has become private, something we don’t discuss along with our politics. What kind of transformation would need to take place to make it obvious to others that we have encountered the Divine in our lives? What kind of transformation happens when we truly encounter God, and how do we share that transformation, or do we veil it in the face of others?

Psalm 99 sings of God’s praises as the ruler of creation, the one who establishes equity and executes justice (vs 4). The song sings of the priests, those who have been faithful not only in following God’s ways but in leading others to God, in speaking on behalf of God to the people, in declaring God’s reign, and in worshiping God. So we look to their example as we follow God and worship God.

Luke 9:28-36 contains the story of the Transfiguration, a story that, as I write every year, still puzzles me. What exactly *did* happen on that mountain? What exactly *did* Peter, John and James see? We immediately link the story of Moses, but the Gospel accounts say that the appearance of Jesus’ face changed. His clothes become dazzling white—perhaps they seemed bright—but we don’t know what Jesus’ face looked like. But what we do know is this: Peter, John and James have had an encounter with the divine beyond Jesus. Their experience so far has been of Jesus the teacher, the healer, the miracle-worker. Now they are seeing a new vision of Jesus, a new understanding of him as the Christ. And they don’t quite know what to do with it. Because Jesus is with Elijah and Moses, Peter offers to make them all three dwellings to be under. And we don’t know why God’s voice says what it does—was God offended by the inherent equating of Jesus to Moses and Elijah? Was Peter just caught up in earthly matters? We don’t know. But what we do know is this: Peter, James and John encounter Jesus in a new way on that mountain, and that experience changes their understanding of Jesus and their relationship with him. Instead of the encounter being reflected in their faces, as with Moses, it is reflected in their experience with Jesus—but they didn’t tell anyone about it. Well, obviously they did, eventually—but they didn’t understand quite what it meant. Have you ever had experiences with God that you couldn’t explain, but seemed frightening, or silly, to share with others? How do we share our experiences with God?

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 uses the image of Moses veiled as an example of how we are not to be anymore. We are to let go of the veil, to reveal our encounter with God through Jesus Christ, to let our experience with God shine through. When we are focused inward, about what others think, we cannot follow God fully. The writer of this passage uses this image of Moses veiled as what happens to our minds, even when we read the scriptures attributed to Moses: we read with a veil over our minds when we are turned inward, away from the concerns of the world and away from the call of God. The veil is removed when we turn to Christ, when we see God reflected in us, and we shine outward God’s goodness, mercy, justice and love.

This is the call of God. As we turn away from the season after the Epiphany, we have left the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany far behind. We have witnessed some of the teachings and miracles of Jesus in the scriptures as he began his ministry. But now we are turning towards the end—the road to Jerusalem, the road to the cross. We are turning to the heart of the Gospel. The journey in the beginning was easier—we left everything to follow him, and to follow meant to learn his teachings and to live his ways. But now the journey will become much harder. We have to resist temptation and seek repentance for the forgiveness of our sins. Most of all, we will journey to the cross of death. As Christ laid down his life for us, so we are called to give of our life to him, to give up being first, to give up our wants and desires to serve others. And like Christ, we will be called to give all for the sake of God’s love of the world. How do we live this transfiguration in our lives? How do we share what our faith means to us? It is more than a conversation that can be controversial. This is our very lives. Do we let it shine, or do we hold it back? Do we still misunderstand? How will you live out your faith differently this Lenten season?

Call to Worship

Though we see in a mirror dimly

 **Then we will see face to face**

Even though we only know part

 **Then we will know in full**

We come to this time of worship seeking God

 **Though God is already present with us**

May we journey with God towards a greater understanding

 **May we journey with each other to deepen our faith. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Author of Life, we come to You knowing we have tried to write our part on our own and have failed. We have believed we could do it all ourselves, and then come seeking You only when we are broken and hurt. Forgive us for not seeking You and Your ways first and foremost. Forgive us for not seeking out the stranger and the oppressed first before giving into our wants, above the needs of others. Call us away from the temptation to write our own lives as the hero in the tale, and instead to follow in Your steps, giving to all in need, joining in solidarity with the outcast, praying with the sick, caring for the poor, visiting the imprisoned. These are not actions the world recognizes as heroic, but these are the roles You have called us into. Help us to live out our story free from the veil of the world. In the name of Christ, who lived and died for us, and lives again, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are written into the Book of Life. You are breathing, You are alive. You are loved and forgiven. You have been given the opportunity to live into New Life. You have been given the opportunity to start afresh. Your future has not been written yet, but there are plans full of hope. Go forth and live into the goodness and mercy of our God. Amen.

Prayer

God of Light, shine in us, so that we might show Your love to the world. Burn in us, so that we might be inspired to make a difference in our world for the oppressed and the downtrodden. Kindle in us sparks of hope when the darkness creeps in, and help us to share this holy fire with others. Cleanse us from the old fears and haunts, so that we might grow deep in faith of Your everlasting love. Help us to share Your light with the world, and help us to shine always without fear. In the name of Christ, who baptizes us with the Spirit and with fire, we pray. Amen.