

Sermon  
Last Epiphany  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
February 27, 2022  
William Bradbury

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

Growing up in Atlanta we occasionally had snow, and every few years we'd have a big snow, so it was not until my late 20s that I experienced a whiteout. We were driving in the mountains of Colorado after Christmas and a storm came up and everything disappeared: the mountains in the distance and the spruce and aspen vanished, and worst of all, the signs along the road disappeared. We were flooded by a sea of white light into which all distinctions and differences disappeared.

Living in Massachusetts you know it is a terrifying experience to lose your landmarks and signposts and not to know which way to turn. All you can do is stop, wait, and hope you don't get run over.

This loss of control is terrifying, but it really is our natural state: we have no control over big things like being born into wealth instead of poverty, or being born with smart, healthy genes instead of a handful of defective ones.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the Bible **the experience of God is also described as a whiteout in which we lose all landmarks and enter the luminous cloud of Divine Presence.**

On Mt Sinai the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud".

And today we hear: "a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud."

As they lose their natural sight a veil is lifted so they can see what is always there: Jesus is always shining with the Radiance of God, Moses and Elijah—all the Jewish saints—are always encouraging us every time we read the Scriptures expecting the Divine Light to shine on us.

**All creation shines with the glory of God,** but it is veiled from our sight until Jesus on the cross tears the veil and fills us with his Spirit.

That's why Paul writes today: "**when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed....** And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, **are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another**; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."

This is why C. S. Lewis writes in his famous essay "The Weight of Glory":

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

"Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

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But we won't see the Divine Light as long as we are trying to control our lives and control our neighbor.

Clearly Vladimir Putin sees the people of Ukraine, not shining with the Light of Christ, but as objects to be controlled and if necessary, killed to reveal his glory.

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Jesus only takes Peter, James, and John into this experience on the holy mountain, because he discerns that as leaders, they need to have the veil temporarily lifted and see the glory of God in the face of Christ and to enter the luminous cloud of God's Presence.

Now as we read this story we too may enter the experience. This is a mountain top experience, to be sure, but it's not the rainbows and unicorns we hoped for. We had hoped we could use God to get more security, success, and control, but what Jesus wants is to remove the veil that keeps the Radiance of God hidden, so that we can drop our dreams of glory and follow the voice of God that says from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Stripped of our ego dreams we can take this command literally—  
**+Listen to Jesus—when he says Love your enemies--**  
**+Listen to Jesus when he says you can't serve both God and money;**  
**+Listen to Jesus when he says forgive your neighbor 70 x 7.**  
**+Listen when he says "take up your cross and follow me".**

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**Christian faith at its heart is not about believing certain doctrines on the two natures of Christ or the triune nature of God—Christian faith, first and foremost, is listening to Jesus and doing what he says.**

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**We've all spent time in whiteouts:** for some it was a long grieving, or an illness, or a lost job, or a troubled kid, or depression, or despair, or a thousand other ways in which we become blind and immobilized...where **all we can do is throw ourselves onto the mercy of God and stop, wait, and hope.**

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I've mentioned before that the holiest man I've ever known up close and personal was Father Warren Scott, an older Black priest, who back in the 1960s and 70's was an icon of Christ for many in the Diocese of Atlanta. **He is also the only person I've known who seemed to glow.**

One day near the end of my first year of seminary the wheels fell off my wagon, so Father Scott (as everyone called him) invited me to his house to share a pot of soup made by his wife Edith, and to share the Blessed Sacrament that the bishop allowed him to keep on a bookshelf in his home.

This 70-year-old Black man was willing to spend time with a disfigured 24-year-old white boy, who desperately needed to be transfigured by the Light of Christ.

**Of course, after my visit I thought, "Great, I'm glad I've got that crisis behind me!"**

But now at his age, I know that **we always have our disfigured selves** living inside us, so we are in daily need of entering the Divine Cloud and knowing again that we are a work in progress so that God continues to lure us into a future of wholeness and love we cannot now imagine.

And as we experience the transfiguring light of Christ and entering the Whiteout of God, we can once again **stop, wait, and listen to Jesus.**