

COME HOME

3-3-19 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Epiphany Last (C): Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

Wow! Can you imagine what it would've been like to be standing on that mountain, hearing God's voice: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"? I mean, hearing the voice of God would be pretty powerful, right? Probably very overwhelming. Even a little scary.

But I'm here to challenge us to consider, if you haven't already, that we all hear God's voice at times. Some of you might not ever actually hear a voice. Maybe your gut just tells you to turn left instead of right, and later you find out you avoided a horrible accident by doing so. Or maybe you are one of those people who occasionally hear a clear voice in your head, but you just haven't attributed it to God.

I've only had this happen to me a few times...and, now that I think about it, each time I was walking alone, out in nature, when I heard a very clear voice. Of course, being a good humble Christian, I'm hesitant to claim I heard the voice of God. But who else would the voice belong to? It wasn't my own voice, and there was no one else around.

The other thing that's been true for me is that—a little bit like the disciples—I wasn't consciously bringing a problem before God. All three times, I was just walking along, minding my own business, when suddenly I heard a sentence—or a couple of phrases—stated very clearly.

The first time it happened, I actually stopped and looked all around me to be sure there wasn't anyone there, while trying to make sense of a suggestion urging me to think about my circumstances differently. The next time I handled the situation a little more comfortably, but still wondered why I would be guided to visit a family friend in jail.

The third occurrence was about a month ago on a hillside in Malibu. I was at a clergy retreat, walking the grounds of a beautiful monastery up on a bluff with a view of the Pacific Ocean. It's a huge piece of property with walking trails, switch-backing along one side of the bluff. The paths wind in and out of shrubbery, succulents and tall grass. So, I am walking along in a sort of prayerful state, when I hear a very clear message: "Come home; just come home."

Unfortunately, for someone like me who likes to know exactly what's going on and what to expect, even though I always hear the statements clearly, the intended message is usually not clear at all.

When I heard: "Come home; just come home," the only thing I was really clear about is that it wasn't my dad's voice asking me to come visit him in Montana. This is a message about something much bigger than going to my hometown. Maybe it's a message about spending more time in prayer. Maybe it's not a message for me, but rather for all of you.

That's the thing about mountaintop experiences, as we see in the reaction of Moses in our Exodus reading, as well as Peter, James and John in the Gospel passage; those experiences, and the meanings they convey, can be very confusing. There are multiple ways of understanding the messages. Mountaintop experiences typically take some time to unpack.

We've talked about mountaintop experiences before; that they don't always happen on a mountaintop and that not just the holiest of holies experience them. You and I can have a mountaintop experience in the midst of our daily lives...if we're paying attention.

What I also know for sure is that until I uncover where and what “home” is for me, the message will continue to be obscured. In the meantime, that’s exactly what a mountaintop experience is designed to do: to take us back down from the mountaintop, and out into daily life, wrestling with how to implement the information.

So, if you notice in this morning’s Gospel reading, after the gang has this incredible experience with God’s glory, they go back down the mountain where Jesus is once again engaged in his day-to-day ministry of healing people. Which is precisely why Jesus discourages the disciples from building dwelling places up on the mountain.

He’s essentially saying, “The experience we just had wasn’t only so we would have the experience; we had the experience to prepare us to go back”—might we say to go back “home”? They had the experience, Jesus’s actions explain, so that they could go back ‘home’ and use it to affect the lives of others.

Moses does this as well; he goes up Mount Sinai to listen to the voice of God, but then comes back down to share the message with the people. Interestingly, part of the conveyed message is done through Moses countenance; his face shines as it reflects God’s glory to the people.

The only problem is, the people can’t handle it! The people are not ready to experience God’s glory in its fullness, so Moses has to wear a veil in their presence. Isn’t that interesting! When he’s with God, he takes off the veil, but with the people, he has to put it on. If I apply the voice I heard to their situation, the people don’t seem to yet understand that God is their home.

Home is not in a dwelling place atop the mountain, and home is not in the comfort of not being stretched to experience new things. Home is in God. We are constantly being prodded as Christians to remember who we are as well as whose we are. In other words, we abide in God and God abides in us.

As we leave the season of Epiphany and prepare to enter the wilderness of Lent, it’s important to know where and what home is: “Come home; just come home”. Christmas and Epiphany have helped reinforce the foundation that God incarnated among us, so that we understand home is in God.

In the reading from 2nd Corinthians the Apostle Paul says it this way: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” In his own legalistic way, Paul retells the story of a veiled Moses to the people of Corinth. His translation is slightly different than what I read in the text, but his message is the same—that we must always be aware that we do these things because God’s glory is reflected onto and through us. It is in that glory—in that sense of being home—where we find freedom, hope, and, in the end, transformation.

In our most recent gathering of the women’s book group, we explored this idea of home in terms of shelter. In the book *Walking in Wonder*, John O’Donohue, a Celtic priest and poet, describes “coming home” as a shelter. He writes: “That shelter is the shelter of your soul, it is the shelter of your God and it is the shelter of your angel.” But he also cautions that unless we are taught to be aware of our shelter, we may overlook it and feel a sense of homelessness. “That shelter is the shelter of your soul, it is the shelter of your God.”

When I think of our strategic plan here at St. Andrew's, I realize that is exactly what we envisioned—that our campus would provide a sense of shelter or “home” to those who might otherwise feel “homeless”. In the end, we are building a dwelling place, but it's not a flashy sanctuary space for us to only enjoy in a mountaintop-experience-sort-of-way.

Instead it is a coming back home kind of building—a place where we can dive further into our healing ministries such as feeding food-insecure neighbors, providing showers to people, and helping others learn to look for the shelter God provides.

This building, along with other renovated spaces, are our way of reflecting God's glory out into the world. Our intent has been to remove the veils, to be completely open and transparent that we are doing our best to listen for God's voice and the voice of those in our community, which is why our campaign acronym is FACE—F.A.C.E: Faith. Action. Community. Everyone.

So, what's home for you? When we realize we belong to God, and that it is God's glory we reflect out into the world, we can let go of worrying that we might be getting too big for our britches, making outlandish claims of hearing God's voice.

Instead, we accept that we all hear God's voice in many ways, and that the messages may have multiple implications, but that each perspective is important. With that understanding, we don't sit on mountaintops trying to figure out the meaning of the message. We simply accept that the message may be important for the world, and, then, let the meaning unfold.

Can you hear Jesus calling? “Come home; just come home.”

-AMEN

The Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Psalm 99

- 1 The LORD is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.
- 2 The LORD is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.
- 3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; *
he is the Holy One.
- 4 "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob."
- 5 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.
- 6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, *
they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.
- 7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.
- 8 O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.
- 9 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

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

About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

[On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]