

Glory Unveiled

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Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Ken Tryon]

Our second reading is from the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 9 verse 28 through 36.

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. **29** And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. **30** Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. **31** They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. **32** 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. **33** 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. **34** While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. **35** Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” **36** 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.

[Voice of Chris Tryon]

This morning’s third reading is from Exodus Chapter 34 verses 29 through 35

29 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. **30** When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. **31** But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. **32** Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. **33** When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; **34** 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, **35** 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.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Thank you Chris. So as I mentioned a few moments ago that the Lenten season starts on Wednesday with Ash Wednesday and so the first Sunday of Lent is one week from today. And I thought since we're starting for Lent next week and we're going to be talking a lot about repentance and about acknowledging our shortcomings - which is an important thing to do as people of faith - I thought that today we should take the opportunity, on this last Sunday before we get into that season, to celebrate an essential truth about each one of you in the room today. Today I want to celebrate an essential truth that's true about each one of you in the room. A very inspiring and hopeful truth. A truth that you may not actually know about yourself. That you may not actually believe about yourself, that you may even wish to deny about yourself, but a truth that is still true. And so, maybe the best thing to do is accept that as truth and think then about how you ought to respond to that inspiring and hopeful truth. Now I'm going to get to what that truth actually is at the end of my sermon, so you need to hang on and look forward to it, because first I need to tell you some of the back story. And the back story has two parts. The 1st part begins during the Exodus. You just heard Chris read this text from the Book of Exodus and you know some of the story, at least, of the Book of Exodus. How God's chosen people, the Israelites, had been enslaved by the Egyptians, and how God had called Moses as the one to lead the people out of captivity and into the Promised Land. And how the people had escaped Pharaoh by the skin of their teeth crossing the Red Sea after Moses had parted the waters. And how the Israelites got right up to the edge of that land that had been promised to them and lost their nerve because they sent in spies to see the land and saw that their enemies would be dangerous and large. And so then they left and were left to wander in the wilderness for forty years before arriving back at the promised land where a new generation that would trust in the Lord would go in with God's blessing. And it was during this period of wandering that today's Hebrew Bible reading - which you just heard - took place.

As you saw in Exodus 34, Moses had gone out to Mount Sinai to speak with God and God had given Moses the 10 words, the 10 Commandments, the tablets of the covenant for the people to follow. Now what you might not know is that this one that you just heard read was the second attempt between the people and God with the stone tablets. The first time this had happened the people had grown so antsy because Moses took so long on the mountain that they decided to make an idol. And they fashioned a golden calf from their jewelry and started to bow down to it in and worship it and that was all a whole problem. You can read about it if you wish in the chapters leading up to the story from today. But so now today Moses is back up on the mountain and he's interceding before God for these impatient, faithless people, and he gets the new stone tablets, and he comes back down from the mountain, and his face is shining. Like literally: beams of light coming out of his face, reflecting off of him out to the

people, because he had been talking in progress close proximity with God. And the people don't know what to do with this. They're they're confused and they're terrified. And so after Moses gives the law to them he puts a veil on his face, over his face, and apparently for the rest of his days Moses would keep the veil on until it was time for him to go and speak with the Lord again, and then he would take it off. And he'd return to the people after he had spoken to the Lord and he would come out with his face shining, and he would tell the people what he'd been commanded, and then he would put the veil back on until next time they need to know.

And you need to know that Moses is the most important figure in the history of the Israelites. He was considered the prophet of all prophets. Only the prophet Elijah came close to the stature of Moses in the history of the people of Israel. And so the people of Israel - for all the generations that followed this event - would have known this story inside and out. They would have known the whole Exodus story really, but the part about the tablets of the law and the shining face of Moses must have imprinted on their minds. They must have known that one particularly well. That probably would have been as well known among the people of Israel as the idea that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves is known to Americans. And that's the first part of the backstory to the inspiring and hopeful truth about you that I want to share with you today.

Now the 2nd part of the back story comes from the Gospel reading for today. It's actually the event that gives today its special name. You may know that today is Transfiguration Sunday. You heard Pastor Jesse talking to the children about that. How many, by the way, would have not given an answer as good as the one that our second grader gave to the question: "What does the word transfiguration mean?". We have our youth and children being in the band and volunteering at our ministries, and doing greeting, I think it's almost time for one of them to preach, apparently! So the Gospel reading from the lectionary today is from Luke Chapter 9 and I'm going to read part of it again - even though you heard it read earlier today - and I want you to notice the parallels now that you've heard the Exodus story. Between this story and that story. And by the way, if you know more of the story than was told in Exodus 34 you might notice some other connection points from studying it yourself, if that's the kind of thing that you've done.

So this is Luke Chapter 9 starting in verse 28, Jesus had just foretold his death and resurrection.

And then about eight days after these sayings 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

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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.

Peter is not one to not say anything, just because he doesn't know what he's about to say. Do you know anybody like that?

While they were saying this a cloud came in 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" and when the voice had spoken Jesus was found alone.

Now there is lots that has been said and could be said about the Transfiguration. It is a major Christian feast day, but the symbolism you see is pretty clear, right? Especially if you know the story that I just told you with Moses radiating and reflecting God's glory to the people. In this story you have Jesus, on a mountain, with a shining face and actually a shining body too, his clothes are gleaming white, interacting as a peer with the two most important figures in Israel's history: Moses and Elijah, who then disappear and leave Jesus standing on the mountain. This singular figure, the prophet who has now transcended all that came before him. It was just as Moses had reflected the glory of God, the way of the Lord on the mountaintop after being close to God. Just as God had shone on Moses and then would shine out from Moses face toward all the people, Jesus now radiates God's glory to His disciples, who stand there much like the Israelites, terrified and confused, babbling about making monuments. So that when we read later in the Christian story, in the book of Hebrews, the letter to Hebrews, that Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being - one of my favorite verses I try to work that into, like, every third or fourth sermon - we can think back when we hear that verse to this moment of the Transfiguration, and see that reflection evidenced in dramatic physical fashion. It's a powerful story. It's a powerful set of images connecting it back into the story of Israel and connecting forward into the story of the early church.

But the message that I want to leave you with today is not about Moses or about the Israelites. And the message is not about Peter or James or John or the early church. The message is about Jesus, and it's about you. It's an inspiring and hopeful truth that is true about you because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. Would you look with me at one last passage of scripture today? If you would like to read along I'm going to look at second Corinthians Chapter 3. And this is on page 139 of the red Bibles if you want to pull it out a look at it, you can. Or if you prefer to just listen to the words that's always OK too. This is a letter from the Apostle Paul, one of the key leaders of the early church, to the Christians in Corinth. This is the second of two

letters to that church that we have recorded in the Bible, and this letter has its own backstory. Quite a lot of backstory, in fact, but I think we could probably all agree that we've had enough backstory for one sermon. So I'm going to leave you to study the backstory of second Corinthians on your own if you are so inclined. What I do want you to know as I begin to read it is that Paul is going to refer in this passage to the story from Exodus that we've already heard read. And that imagery, because of what we just talked about, I think will hopefully evoke some of the story of the Transfiguration as well, which is how I think this particular reading ended up being one of the readings for Transfiguration Sunday that the lectionary editors give to us.

Second Corinthians Chapter 3. Chapter 3 verses 12 through the end and then the first couple of verses of chapter 4. Since then we have such a hope now you know I never say I can't let this go by but I'm going to let it go by right what is therefore there for cents but because of this all those things are key that you should probably read the back story but we're not going to today.

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 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 [c] was being set aside. 14 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. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;

I'll pause at the end of verse 15 to tell you, yes he is sort of disparaging his fellow Jews who have not accepted Christ. Who have not converted to Christianity.

16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 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.

1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 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.

I want to draw your attention to verse 18. And all of us with unveiled faces are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Do you hear the magic in that passage? All of us. All of us. Undergoing Transfiguration with unveiled faces. We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. As we look ahead through the season of Lent to the cross, that will evoke for most of us - regardless of how much religious background we have - this pervasive idea that Jesus is our substitute that on the cross. Jesus is taking our place and receiving what we ought to receive. But in our continual really emphasizing of that aspect of the cross I worry very much that we have forgotten the flip side of that exchange. Which is to say, it's not just that on the cross Jesus is identifying with

humankind - and by the way, not just with the guilty, but with the accusers and with the accused wrongly - but that we also identify with God through Christ. Do you hear what an incredible gift that is? What a powerful and majestic reality that is. When you see the cross, I don't want you to only see Jesus taking your place. I want you to see yourself taking Jesus' place. I want to see yourself identifying with Christ as He is identified with you.

That is good news! That is staggering, dazzling, shiny bright good news! Let me ask you a question. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Who do you - let's say it like this - who do you see when you look in the mirror? This isn't a trick question, any child can answer this question. Who do you see when you look in the mirror? You see yourself. Did you notice that I skipped over a little bit of mirror talk in this verse? Verse 18: "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." Now in the ancient world they didn't have perfect mirrors like we have. They had - what do you think you looked at to see a reflection in the ancient world? It wasn't something that you bought at Walmart. It was probably a piece of polished metal, right? That was about as shiny and reflective as you could get. So it was not a perfect reflection, but it was a reflection. And Paul is saying: when you look into that mirror you are seeing as this, as your own face stares back at you, the glory of the Lord. Because you are being transformed into the same image as Jesus was on the mountaintop, not all at once, not in an instant like it was for Jesus, but from one degree of glory to another. Bit by bit by bit you are receiving, yourself, this glory of God and reflecting it into the world around you.

So when you look in the mirror I don't want you to see just your own face and all of the baggage that might come with the things you've been told about yourself. Not just the way you look, but who you are and the things that you've done. I don't want you to just see yourself, but I do want you to see yourself. What I want you to see when you see yourself is the glory of God, because that's what you're looking at. That's what's looking back at you. And that would be true just by virtue of the fact that you were created by God and that you bear, in some sense, God's image and likeness. That is true for all people who have ever lived or ever will live. But what's even more wonderful is that if you will allow the Spirit to transform you, you will become more and more like Jesus. You will reflect more and more of the Light of God. From one degree of glory to another. And that is the hopeful and inspiring truth that I want you to know about yourself. Because it may get kind of dark and dreary over the next several weeks. Lent is the most "goth" of all the Christian seasons.

Audience laughs

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I want you to go into that season knowing: Yes you need to repent, yes you have fallen short, yes there are things you need to change about yourself. Yes you need to increase in your discipline as you pursue the faith and seek to follow Jesus, but you need to know as you get going into that journey that you - just as you are today - reflect the glory of God. And that you are in the process of being transformed. Transfigured, just as Jesus and Moses on the mountain tops were changed.

And so here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pass out some post it notes and there are pens like, tucked into the chairs. There there should be. I'll send one around with it just in case. I wanted to take a post it note, and I want you to write the word glory on it, OK? Abel you can send that pen with with this batch here. You don't have to write the word glory if there's a different word that you like better you can use it, but I want you to write something that when you take this home and put it on your bathroom mirror, or whatever mirror it is you look into first in your day, I want you to remember this week that whatever whatever negative image you might have of yourself or someone else might have of you, the image that I have of you, and the image that is drawn out of you in Christ, is one of the glory of God. So you just stick that on your mirror when you get home so that you don't forget that. Let me pray for you.

Our God we make our way through the world receiving so many negative messages about ourselves from others. From those who hate us, from those who ought to love us, from ourselves. Thank you for this hopeful and inspiring truth that the Spirit is transforming us from one degree of glory to another. Help us to believe oh Lord in this most difficult of truths, to go forth and through the world in the confidence and joy that comes from knowing we are your beloved children radiating your glory, just as your Son radiates your glory. Transform us and transfigure us we pray. Amen.

As our band comes and leads us in a couple of more songs we have the privilege to take communion together. This is the sacrament of grace and sustenance that is offered every week at Artisan as our response to hearing the Word proclaimed. So if you are seeking to follow Jesus, if you are hoping to radiate His glory, I invite you to come. Whether you're a member of this church or any church, whether it's your first time or 5000th time. Coming receive this grace. May it be the real presence of Jesus the Savior, his body and blood. May it be an act of unity with each other and other Christians around the world and throughout the history of the church. And may it be sustenance and food for your tired souls. I'll remind you that there's a member of the prayer team who would be happy to pray with you in this time if you prefer to do that instead of, or after, or before taking communion. And your kids are probably ready to

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see you as well and they're invited to all of this if you'd like to have them participate. If that's what you'd like to do, our table is open, come and receive Him.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com