

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 23, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Exodus 24:12–18 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

In Chapter 19 after three months in the wilderness, the children of Israel arrive at the mountain of the Lord in Sinai. A thick cloud descended and, on the third day, the voice of the God proclaimed the Ten Commandments followed by a series of laws (Chapters 20-23). After the taking of a blood oath agreeing to these laws, God then calls Moses into the cloud to receive the law and instructions for building the Tabernacle (Chapters 25-31). According to verse 18, this took forty days and forty nights during which time the people believed that Moses had died or left them. This sets the stage for the golden calf in Chapter 32. Note the importance of numbers in this story. Moses first went up the mountain and into the cloud for seven days (creation) and returned for another forty (flood). With the Moses and the Law, God was doing a new thing (creation) not with a patriarch (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), but with a nation based on Law. Judgment (flood) would be based now on obedience to the Law and ritual worship (Tabernacle).

Commentary on 2 Peter 1:16–21 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This is one of the church's earliest argument for what theologians call a "theophany" or revelation of God. Myths are elaborate stories to try and explain some mystery or phenomenon. These usually include some divine being or beings engaged in a very human activity that has superhuman results. They can range from how mountains and canyons were formed to why there is lightning and thunder. A theophany, however, is a revelation from God that is witnessed. It does not try to explain the event or create an anthropomorphic (having human characteristics) story to justify the event. It simply says that a bush looked like it was burning without actually burning or that Jesus was surrounded by glory and a voice spoke. In the same way, prophecy is the written witness to the words of God heard through the Holy Spirit. Unlike modern use of prophecy, true Biblical prophecy is not a future prediction but rather it is simply the Word of God for the people that day. It may be a promise for the future, a word of forgiveness about the past, or a message of comfort for those suffering now. The word is conveyed through and interpreted by the Holy Spirit as a means of revelation.

Commentary on Matthew 17:1–9 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The Transfiguration also occurs in Mark 9:2-10 and Luke 9:28-36. On the major points, the three Gospels agree but there are a few differences like Luke stating that the disciples fell asleep foreshadowing the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew only adds a few lines to the basic witness. After agreeing with Mark that it was six days (Luke says eight), Jesus is transfigured and "his face shone like the sun" just like Moses in Exodus 34:29. For Matthew, Jesus is the new lawgiver but, instead of a tablet of stone, he is the totality of the law. As if giving the seal of approval to the new interpretation of the Law given on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew adds "with whom I am well pleased" to the Father's proclamation. Just as the Israelites were afraid of Moses, Matthew has the disciples overcome by fear. Where the old interpretation of the Law condemns, Jesus graciously touches them and tells them to "Get up and do not be afraid." The Transfiguration provides a pivot in Matthew from teaching about the Law to Jesus fulfilling the Law on the cross.

Sermon "Living the Mystery" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

To believe in the Trinity, consubstantiation, or even the transfiguration is to have faith in the midst of mystery. The legend goes that a great theologian was trying to work out the mystery of the Trinity and took a break by walking on the beach. He soon came across a boy digging a large hole in the sand. When asked what he was doing, the boy responded he was digging a big enough hole to hold

the ocean. The theologian told the boy that it was impossible to which the boy responded, "Your trying to explain the Trinity". Even though God is infinite, people would rather cling to finite doctrines than accept the mystery of God. But where did those doctrines come from you may ask. Doctrines were created in an attempt to make logical sense of the revelations of God.

Jesus said that the bread and wine was his very body and blood. Does this mean that somehow the communion elements transform during the service (transubstantiation) or is it transform for each individual when it is received by faith (consubstantiation)? How do we explain this mystery - I don't know. What I do know is a testimony from a fellow pastor about the time he served communion to an atheist. The atheist wanted to prove to himself and others that there was nothing special about communion. Although he was conflicted, when the atheist came forward the pastor was moved to give him communion. Later that afternoon, the atheist was banging on the parsonage door demanding what was in the bread and juice. After the pastor assured him it was Hawaiian Bread and Welch's, the atheist showed him a red welted on his chest over his heart where a crumb had landed. The atheist gave his life to Christ that day. Why? How? It is the mystery of God.

The church proclaims that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. How can Jesus be both mortal and immortal, man and God? I don't know but on the day of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John witnessed both at once. As Peter later writes, "we did not follow cleverly devised myths ... but we had been eyewitnesses". They saw the totality of who Jesus was and it blinded and terrified them. Just like Moses had done on the mountain when he came across the burning bush, Peter came face to face with the mystery of God. Peter tried to contain the mystery in shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus but the mystery of God can not be contained.

Ever since Moses went up the mountain to receive the law, religious leaders have attempted to translate the mystery of God into human language and law. The Pharisees and the Sadducees pointed to the Law and the Prophets as the authority on God. Jesus challenged this limitation of God in the sermon on the mount. When Peter, James, and John heard God say "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!", they knew that Jesus and not the religious leaders was correct. They fell to their knees for who can withstand the judgment of God? And yet, Jesus touched them and said, "Get up and do not be afraid." This is the greatest mystery of all - God's grace. Jesus is both the totality of the Law and the totality of Grace. The full implications of this would not be revealed until the day of Jesus resurrection for in Jesus all things are made new.