

## **Transformed: Moses**

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael –February 16 2025

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

**Readings:** Exodus 34:27-35; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18; Acts 7:35-39 CEB

**Reflection:** Psalm 99

**Greeting:** The Lord works righteousness and does justice for all who are oppressed. God made his ways known to Moses and his deeds known to the Israelites. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love. All you heavenly forces, bless the Lord! All you who serve him and do his will, bless him! Praise the Lord! (Psalm 103)

**Prayer:** Precious Lord, we have seen the way that you can change hearts and lives through your steadfast love and faithfulness. May you help us to remember the transformation we see in the lives that you have touched. That we may remember the faithfulness of your servant Moses and the way that he was changed in your glory as you changed the world. Grant that we may know your peace and grace so that we may share it with others. May you lift our hearts in worship so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to reach out to one another this day so that we may love our neighbor as ourselves as we further devote ourselves to loving you, O God. May you prepare us so that we may be transformed and call others to a life that is changed through walking with Jesus Christ, our Lord and friend. And it is in his name that we pray this day. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 99

*<sup>5</sup> Magnify the Lord, our God! Bow low at his footstool! He is holy! <sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel too among those who called on his name. They cried out to the Lord, and he himself answered them— <sup>7</sup> he spoke to them from a pillar of cloud. They kept the laws and the rules God gave to them. <sup>8</sup> Lord our God, you answered them. To them you were a God who forgives but also the one who avenged their wrong deeds. <sup>9</sup> Magnify the Lord our God! Bow low at his holy mountain because the Lord our God is holy!*  
(Psalm 99:5-9 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 99, and we hear of God's goodness. That God's glory has been revealed to the people. That we know the forgiveness that comes from God's great steadfast love and faithfulness. How have you had your own life changed by God's love? How do you share the love of Christ with others so that they can also experience that kind of transformation? Who will you lift up in your prayers this week? Who is it that you can help through the love of Christ?

**Prayer:** Eternal God, we thank you for always being there for us. That you are with us in the good and the bad, in the easy and the difficult. We are grateful that you are with us in all that

we are and all that we do. Today we remember the promise you made when you transformed Moses that he could reflect your glory. May we remember the many blessings that you have shown to your people. We come before you in prayer this day lifting up the many joys and concerns that we have. We lift up our celebrations that we may celebrate them with you. We lift up our sorrows so that we may find comfort in your presence. We come together to share the prayers that we have lifted up aloud together. But we also lift up the unspoken prayers that we hold in our hearts. For we know that you hear every prayer that we lift up to you. May you strengthen us in the prayers we speak and the silent pleadings from within. May we know you are there in both our laughter and our tears. May we remember you in our dancing and our mourning. For you are always with us, Lord. May we experience your great love that transforms lives. May we love ever deeper because you are with us. And may we always celebrate Jesus Christ, our steadfast friend and Savior. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Exodus chapter 34, verses 27 through 35.

*<sup>27</sup> The Lord said to Moses: "Write down these words because by these words I hereby make a covenant with you and with Israel." <sup>28</sup> Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He didn't eat any bread or drink any water. He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten words. <sup>29</sup> Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw the skin of Moses' face shining brightly, they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> But Moses called them closer. So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke with them. <sup>32</sup> After that, all the Israelites came near as well, and Moses commanded them everything that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup> When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. <sup>34</sup> Whenever Moses went into the Lord's presence to speak with him, Moses would take the veil off until he came out again. When Moses came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup> the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was shining brightly. So Moses would put the veil on his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the Lord. (Exodus 34:27-35 CEB+)*

Our next reading is from 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 7 through 18.

*<sup>7</sup> The ministry that brought death was carved in letters on stone tablets. It came with such glory that the Israelites couldn't look for long at Moses' face because his face was shining with glory, even though it was a fading glory. <sup>8</sup> Won't the ministry of the Spirit be much more*

*glorious? <sup>9</sup> If the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? <sup>10</sup> In fact, what was glorious isn't glorious now, because of the glory that is brighter. <sup>11</sup> If the glory that fades away was glorious, how much more glorious is the one that lasts! <sup>12</sup> So, since we have such a hope, we act with great confidence. <sup>13</sup> We aren't like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites couldn't watch the end of what was fading away. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were closed. Right up to the present day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. The veil is not removed because it is taken away by Christ. <sup>15</sup> Even today, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But whenever someone turns back to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:7-18 CEB+)*

Our final reading is from Acts chapter 7, verse 35 through 39.

*<sup>35</sup> "This is the same Moses whom they rejected when they asked, 'Who appointed you as our leader and judge?' This is the Moses whom God sent as leader and deliverer. God did this with the help of the angel who appeared before him in the bush. <sup>36</sup> This man led them out after he performed wonders and signs in Egypt at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. <sup>37</sup> This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' <sup>38</sup> This is the one who was in the assembly in the wilderness with our ancestors and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai. He is the one who received life-giving words to give to us. <sup>39</sup> He's also the one whom our ancestors refused to obey. Instead, they pushed him aside and, in their thoughts and desires, returned to Egypt. (Acts 7:35-39 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week This week we come to the first of the three people central to the Transfiguration. Our first is Moses, and Moses gives us an interesting person to look at for his transformation because there are multiple points that we could consider Moses life to be transformed. Because Moses goes through many changes in his journey with God. Moses goes through many things that alter the direction of his life. Moses in the Transfiguration represents the law. I mention this because the Transfiguration can be a confusing thing to hear about. In a few weeks we will be talking about Jesus appearing with Moses and Elijah on the mountain. For this, we will be covering both Moses and Elijah in the two weeks prior to this. Today, we hear about Moses and the real physical transformation he undergoes because of being on the mountain in God's presence.

Moses is on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. He fasts and he writes on the tablets. When he comes back down, he does not know that he is glowing. He doesn't know it until everyone else sees him and they are afraid. They are afraid of Moses and this glow he has

from being in the presence of the Lord. Nobody wants to even go near Moses at this point. Eventually he puts a veil over his face so that they don't have to see the light coming from his face. He has to hide the way that he is shining. But whenever he goes into the Lord's presence, the veil is removed. And whenever he is back with the Israelites, the veil goes on to his face. Now, there are many ways we could read this, and I think that the symbolism is important here. Because Moses comes down with the law and it is difficult for the people to accept this without the veil going over Moses' face. They need a buffer between the people and God's holiness.

We hear a little bit more about this in Acts. Acts gives a brief overview of Moses and the Israelites. We hear about how Moses faced constant doubt from the people. We hear about how Moses is constantly doubted along with God's plan for the people. Acts gives us a review of how God appeared as a burning bush to Moses. That Moses then went to challenge pharaoh. That Moses strives with him and wins. That Moses leads the people out of Egypt and into the wilderness. And it is there in the wilderness that the Israelites really begin to doubt Moses. Moses speaks to God and receives the law and people still doubt him. Moses provides them with food and water and the people still doubt him. In their hearts, they feel like they would have been better off staying as slaves in Egypt. Because at least in Egypt they had certainty. Moses glows with the light of the Lord and it is too much for the people to handle.

Paul really takes up the symbolism in his second letter to the Corinthians. Paul notes that Moses comes with the law and the people cannot look upon the glory that shines from being in the presence of the Lord. So, Moses has to hide the light. A barrier is put in place because Moses shines with the presence of the Lord. I think Paul gets into a really interesting framing of this. Because he notes that we aren't like Moses who used to put a veil over his face to hide the light. That happened because of the closed minds of the Israelites. They were afraid. He sees the old covenant as a veil, a veil that Christ lifts. That it was a barrier between us and God. When the law of Moses is read, that veil remains on those who don't believe. But when people turn to the Lord, the veil is removed. We are being transformed into the image of the Lord from one degree of glory to the next.

I was thinking about this because all of this made me wonder about how often we are afraid of the light. That Moses had to hide the glory of God that shone in his face because people were afraid. How often are we afraid of the things that could transform our lives? That we might describe someone who has been in communion with Christ as glowing. Maybe not physically, but symbolically. That we reflect the joy that we find in being with Christ. John Wesley had an experience like that, where he felt his heart being strangely warmed. He faced his own transformation, his own personal glow. Moses had to put on a veil because that glow was too much for some people. Because fully embracing what God's love is can be too much for some people. This is something that we have to face head on. Because even if it feels like a lot, we have to embrace that love. We have to embrace the way that the love of Christ transforms hearts and lives. That change can be difficult. Especially if we have to face difficult truths along with it. I don't mean difficult judgements. It is easy to be judgmental. It is difficult to care. It is easy to hate. It is difficult to love. The love we are called to have in Christ is difficult because it challenges us to let go of our own feelings and to love and care as Christ cares for

others. Sometimes we want to put a veil on it, to hide it, to quiet it. We want to put it out of sight, making it feel unobtainable, like something that doesn't need to be discussed. But Christ lifts the veil because understanding God's love and living it through a life in Christ are important.

Moses is not ashamed of his transformation. Moses gladly takes off the veil when he is in the presence of the God that brings him joy, that brings him salvation. It's the people that are afraid. It's the people around him that are worried, that need a barrier between them and God's glory. When Paul talks about Christ lifting that veil, I think of it as taking away that need to have a barrier between us and God's love because Christ reminds us of what true love looks like. Christ reminds us of what empathy looks like, what it looks like to care for others. What it looks like to have genuine concern for the least and the last. That the Israelites simply wanted what would make them safe, and that's why they yearned for Egypt. Because though they were not treated well, they knew what to expect. With Moses, they did not because there was a kind of freedom that came with following God into the wilderness, just like there is a freedom in the spirit when we embrace Christ. And that freedom can be scary because it means that we now have to choose to do what is right. That if we let ourselves be beholden to the law and the law alone, we are not embracing God's love, but we are embracing the rules that make it so that we don't have to think. That we are not embracing the love that we find in Christ, we are simply looking for the easiest way to not have to choose. Because Christ gives us the freedom to choose how we will love and how we will care for others, and that kind of freedom is frightening for some. It is frightening because it means that we're in charge of how we accept Christ. We have to decide if we see someone who is hungry if we give them food. We have to decide if we see someone who is thirsty if we give them a drink. We have to decide if we see a stranger if we will welcome them. We have to decide if we see someone naked if we will give them clothes to wear. We have to decide if we see someone who is sick if we will take care of them. We have to decide if we see someone in prison if we visit them. Because we have to decide if we will let the love of Christ transform our lives, or if we will put a veil over the love we experience to make it easier to ignore. I encourage us all to reflect on the way that we interact with Christ and the way that it transforms our own lives. That we have to accept or deny that transformation. That we may reflect on the ways that we think of others and the way that we love our neighbor as ourselves as we love God. And may we always look at the way that we can say yes through faith to having our own hearts and our own lives transformed by the love of God through living a life in Jesus Christ our Lord. And may we always accept the invitation from Christ to have our own lives be transformed. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Transformed**

This series is a 7-week series about transformation. Each week will look at a different person from the Bible that was transformed by God. Each one tells a unique story about God's love and grace that are there for all people. Each person's tale of transformation gives us insight into how God can heal our brokenness. And each gives us hope that we may all be Transformed through a life in Jesus Christ.

1/19: Abraham & Sarah    1/26: Jacob    2/2: Zacchaeus    2/9: Paul  
2/16: Moses    2/23: Elijah    3/2: Jesus

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#### **Etna UMC**

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Worship 9:30am

Rev Camron D St.Michael  
<https://stmichael.pw>  
cdstmichael@outlook.com  
(316)530-3182 (call or text)  
PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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