

What Dwells Within

Exodus 34:29-35; I Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36; Psalm 99 2-18-07

My mother was a treasure trove of one-liners and pithy little sayings that were meant to guide my siblings and me on our pathways in life. I am sure your mothers also had a set of stock solutions to life's puzzles as do present day mothers. As I grow older I appreciate her and her life more and more and I remember many of the things she told me as I was growing up. One thing she always told me was, "Never judge a book by its cover."

As a child I am sure I did not understand this very well. I was an avid reader and spent much of my time in the old library in the heart of the village in which I grew up. It is no longer a village but a city now and the dear old library with the creaky floors, the smell of books and the old stereopticon with sets of pictures to view is long gone. Most of the books there did not have fancy covers. They were simply bound in plain, practical fabric. But, I learned that I never would be able to guess what treasures the books contained from what they looked like.

As I grew older and a little wiser, I learned the truth of my mother's little one-liner as I looked at the people around me. Some of those with the crankiest faces were tremendously kind and generous. Others, who appeared to be all sweetness and light, could be some of the most miserable people I have ever encountered. I learned, as I considered life, that we can never guess what dwells within another human at first glance.

This Sunday is known as the Sunday of the Transfiguration. It is called that because we read the story of Jesus being "transfigured" on a mountaintop in the presence of his disciples. His appearance changed and he shone with brilliance. Brighter than a fuller's or bleacher's white.

Some say that this event took place for the benefit of his disciples. It was important that they began to understand more fully just who he was and his importance in the world. They needed to see more clearly just what it was that dwelt within Jesus and that made him so special. When they saw Moses and Elijah with him, they must have known that he was vital in God's plan for humankind. They were Jews and they most likely had heard the stories of the men who had established their religion. Now they were following someone new who had a fresh angle on the old plan. The story of the Transfiguration seemed to reassure them that they were on the right track in leaving all they had and knew behind to follow him.

We read in Exodus that a similar thing happened to Moses when he was in the presence of God receiving the Law. He apparently did not know that his face was glowing when he came down from the mountain. To keep the nation Israel from becoming alarmed at his altered appearance, he would cover his face with a veil which he would remove when he went back to talk to God.

The two happenings are quite different. We might think that the reason Moses took on this glow was to help convince him that he was God's prophet, something he had resisted earlier in his life, and to reinforce to those who followed him, the entire nation, that he was to be listened to. Moses retained his glow, while Jesus seems to have lost it. But, just because he did not walk around glowing did not mean that he was not aglow inside.

When I read over these two readings for this morning early last week, an old song went through my mind—as you well know, this is not an unusual happening. The chorus of that song is:

"But I see your true colors
Shining through
I see your true colors
And that's why I love you

So don't be afraid to let them show
Your true colors
True colors are beautiful,
Like a rainbow.”

The true inner glow that Moses and Jesus possessed, while not the colors of a rainbow, shone through them both, not just for an instant, but in what they did and said throughout their lives. Their inner beings were integrated with what they showed the world. This made them genuine people. What people saw was what they got.

Paul in his Letter to the church at Corinth told those who read him, and those who read him still, that no matter how someone might dress up the foundation of his or her being, if it is not a genuine reflection of what it is that dwells within it will all come to naught. For we are God's temples and as such must reflect the Spirit which dwells within. If we ignore the need to integrate what is true and genuine within us with that which we show the world, we will be the losers. We are the guardians of God's mysteries and we must be trusted to handle them with care.

This is a tremendously overwhelming requirement of us. We read in Jeremiah last week that “the heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.” Paul is saying the same thing.

We all tend to hide our true selves behind a variety of masks and deceptions. We do this to protect ourselves from the ravages of life. This is human nature. Some of us are very good at this and we manage to keep others a safe distance away from us. Others of us are not quite as good at hiding our selves away. But we all have a special face for the world that protects what dwells within. This brings me to another portion of a song written by Billy Joel that sings:

“Well we all have a face
That we hide away forever
And we take them out and
Show ourselves
When everyone has gone
Some are satin some are steel
Some are silk and some are leather
They're the faces of the stranger
But we love to try them on.”

When we are ready, and this takes a level of maturity and a sense that we are right with God in our inner beings, we are able to remove the masks that cover our true selves and let what it is that dwells within shine out for all to see. We are able to integrate our internals with that which is external. This takes courage and strength and a sense that we can stand up to the world with honesty and integrity and that we can handle all it manages to throw at us because we have God on our side and we are the place wherein God dwells.

If we come to believe that we are the cherished children of a God who loves us and whose Spirit is at the center of our beings, we can reveal ourselves more fully to those around us. If we have as our center the love and the way of Christ it can only make the world a better place. We, as did Jesus and Moses, will become true revelations and reflections of our God. Amen