



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Glory Waiting To Be Seen

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

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In today's reading from Exodus, Moses is feeling very confident in his relationship with God. He is actually giving instruction to God, telling God that it's not enough for God to favor Moses, but that YHWH must favor the nation that has followed him out of slavery and into the wilderness. Moses is advocating for a new and obvious relationship between God and this people. He says, "In that way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth."

One thing to know here is that in the Ancient Near East, gods were more or less location specific. Their influence and protection was experienced in a particular locale and if you left that place, you were out of reach of its god. So Moses, in his summation, offers God something different. If YHWH continues to be present as the people move from place to place, he will be understood as a god surpassing all limitation - greater than any local deity. We can imagine God considering this, nodding and saying "Hmmm, I like that!"

Then Moses, feeling a little full of himself goes one step too far. He says, "Show me your glory..." God reels him in a bit, saying "I will let you see my goodness and the grace and mercy that go with it, but even you, Moses, cannot see my face. You are not wired to see my full glory."

The thing we have to ask here is, "what is God's glory?" First a little word study courtesy of Presbyterian seminary professor Mark Roberts. "The word translated here as "glory" is ***kabod*** in Hebrew. Curiously, this word is derived from a root with the basic meaning of "heavy." From this root came--among other things--a word meaning "rich." Speakers of ancient Hebrew would refer to a rich person as "heavy in wealth" much as we might say someone is loaded. A similar extension of the literal sense of ***kabod*** included being loaded with power, reputation, or honor. It's from this use of the word that we get the meaning of glory. God's glory is God's weightiness in wonderful qualities such as might, beauty, goodness, justice, and honor. When it comes to these characteristics and so many others, God has them in superabundance. God's glory reflects God's essential nature."

My interpretation of God's glory is the whole truth of God's being. And here up on the mountain, God does his best Jack Nicholson impression--"Moses, you can't handle the truth!" No we can't--in our present form--we can't handle that much current. It would overload our circuits and probably kill us. So when we have an experience of God's glory, it is a filtered version, something we can handle. God shields us from the full force of the power and instead

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gives us a banquet of glorious moments and glimpses of the holy. For us, those glimpses can be powerful.

I saw a photo this week that immediately filled me with a sense of glory. It was a picture of Vivian Boyack who is 91 and Alice Dubes who is 90. After 72 years as a couple, they were finally able to get married. The part of God's glory that I saw in these two women, both of whom are in wheelchairs, was faithfulness and love in the face of a culture that has probably spit on them numerous times if not done worse. Remember in Exodus today God said about glory, that "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." God's glory shines around Vivian and Alice because their life together reflects a part of God. God's glory, in the form of compassion is present, dwelling in the ones who need it for strength and courage and in the ones who need it because they are angry and frightened. Believe it or not, there are people who are afraid of Vivian and Alice because to them such a marriage constitutes a threat to the very fabric of our society. Personally, I would rather see glory than fear. I expect to see some glory right here next Saturday when two members of this congregation, Jeff Litke and Drew Cosenza, lay their relationship at God's feet and make vows and promises and frame their life together as a part of God's life. This will be a first for us at Trinity and it will represent a journey of many years, much discernment and theological reflection on the sacramental aspects of marriage and relationship and what it means to be human, and what God's grace looks like. We don't get to choose the recipients of grace, but sometimes we get to witness it.

Part of our youth group went to Bridgeport yesterday to take part in a day of service. It was a day of hard work and bonding. We planted shrubbery and hundreds of bulbs in a park and then we spent the afternoon at Walters Memorial AME Zion Church. It is a wonderful place because of the wonderful people who come together in spirit filled joy. Walters Memorial is the oldest African American Church in Bridgeport, founded 180 years ago by freed slaves. The church was a stop on the underground railroad, the hiding room is in the basement of the church. They are about 3 blocks from the Long Island Sound and Hurricane Irene hit them hard. They had just finished restoration work when Sandy blew into town. Their beloved church building is now designated unsafe and they will have to tear it down. When they rebuild, they will no longer have a basement because of the flood plain. All that will remain of the legacy of courageous service to those seeking freedom is a small memorial outside. They have no endowment to help them and must step forward in faith and fear at the amount that they will need to rebuild. They have, fortunately, another building on their property in which they are worshipping and teaching, rehearsing music and taking care of the business of being the church.

What was palpable yesterday as we painted and then helped to set up their worship space was glory. Despite the challenges facing them, they shone with something that was humbling and invigorating at the same time. We laughed a lot as we shared the work of the day

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in their cinderblock worship space. The part of God that was shining so gloriously was community, joy and hope. We became friends and have plans to become better friends.

Moses asked to see God's glory. We didn't have to yesterday. God filled up our teenagers with a glowing friendship as deep as if they had grown up together, although in truth, they are very new to each other. They simply allowed themselves to be an instant community - discovering that doing for others made them happy. Their glory, the display of their true selves, was disarmingly authentic. My car may smell like hamburgers and onions but it still echoes with laughter. I am so grateful to have witnessed and taken part in the day because it was so holy, so filled with the glory of God.

God's glory is all around us, little glimpses of the truth of God that come to us in color, beauty and landscape, courage and hope, love and compassion, friendship and laughter. You know it when it happens; God has passed by with a shimmer, leaving us awakened and refreshed. For now, we don't need to see God's glory in its totality. There is enough of it around if you are ready to see it.

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