

Parish of Esher  
Christ Church, Esher with St George's, West End

## SERMON

Sunday next before Lent, 3 March 2019  
9am Sung Communion, St George's, West End  
Exodus 34.29-end; Psalm 99; Luke 9.28-36

Ven. David Gerrard

In the Name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Luke 9.30 They saw two men, Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. They appeared in glory.

We have two well-known and closely linked readings this morning. The first is the passage when Moses descended from Mount Sinai bringing with him the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. But the main thrust of this reading is not the bringing of the commandments but the appearance of Moses. The skin on his face shone because he had been talking to God, the brightness of his face a reflection of the glory of God.

It was very rare and very dangerous for any of the people of Israel to address or to see God. God dwelt on high in glory. He was distant, kingly, powerful, and we all know it is dangerous to be in the presence of any earthly rulers, still more dangerous to be close to the Almighty. The alteration in the appearance of Moses was a physical change. His skin glowed, his face shone. and people who saw him were afraid for he exhibited some of the characteristics of God. Moses himself was afraid, and he kept his face covered by a veil until he went to listen to God.

The second reading comes from Luke's Gospel and is very similar. Jesus had taken his three closest disciples, James and John and Peter up a mountain where he wished to pray. This mountain, perhaps high and steep hill is more accurate description, is now called, after this event, the Mount of Transfiguration, and it is a hard climb to reach the top, but one is rewarded with wonderful views over much of the Holy Land from the summit.

Jesus spoke to his three disciples and when he had finished speaking Peter and James and John saw a miraculous appearance, that of two great prophets, Moses and Elijah, speaking to Jesus. And the two holy men were not as normal for they appeared in glory. Nor was Jesus looking as usual for his clothes were dazzling white and his face, like that of Moses in the book of Exodus was changed from its normal appearance. This vision was vastly important, indeed momentous, to John and Peter and James, and Peter, always the leader, asked Jesus if they could build three shelters, dwellings, so that Jesus and Elijah and Moses could stay in them.

But moments of glory cannot be held onto for ever, they soon depart, and the occurrence continued when a cloud suddenly covered them and they were terrified. And then, most frightening of all a voice came from the cloud, the very voice of God himself giving one of those rare experiences, a rare message as in the baptism of Jesus, telling Peter and James and John, and all of us, "This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him."

So both in the passages from Exodus and from Luke we have two miraculous events that showed the glory of God. "Glory" is a word that occurs often in the Scriptures and in our Liturgy and is usually used about God himself. Glory is associated with power, especially with rulers and kings. It is a state of rare honour but it is not just about authority and power. It is also about beauty, brilliant radiant beauty. We speak of the glory of the sunrise. And it is also the description in paintings of the saints of a halo, an aura, radiant light surrounding the head of the saints. So it was when Moses came down Mount Sinai in glory, and when the prophets appeared to Jesus in Glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Above all glory is associated with the divine, with God himself. "To God be the Glory" we sing, as well as that great hymn of praise the Gloria itself, "Glory to God in the Highest." And it is attached to the ending of all the psalms in the Christian tradition of God the Holy Trinity. "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be for ever."

So for us as we listen to, and read, these passages it reminds us of the majesty, power and beauty of God, and also reminds us that we cannot dwell in his presence for any but the briefest moment of time, and, perhaps

most important of all, that no human being should have the pride, the arrogance to believe or to speak of themselves as partaking in the glory of God, to whom be ascribed as is most justly due, all power, majesty, dominion and glory, today and for ever.

Amen.