

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
Exodus 34:29-35 *It's Time to Glow Up!*

February 23, 2019
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Last year a friend raved about a new makeup she was using that's generally referred to as a glow stick. It's supposed to take the place of eye shadow, rouge, and highlighter. (I thought highlighters were for text books, not faces, but I digress.) According to instructions on the box, the glow stick is to be applied directly to the areas of the face you wish to highlight including cheekbones, bridge of the nose, above and below the brows, and the contour of the upper lip to "instantly give your complexion a healthy glow with an even dewy finish and a weightless feel." Because my friend loved her cosmetic glow stick so much, I went out and bought the drugstore version of it and I have been highlighting my cheekbones and brows with it ever since. I have, however, not used it on the bridge of my nose because some of us don't need the bridges of our noses "highlighted" any more than what the Good Lord already has done. And while I wouldn't say that, since using the glow stick, my face now has the "dewy, weightless finish" promised on the packaging, it is a bit shinier in places which I always thought was something to be avoided by applying heavy face powder to the shiny spots but I guess times have changed and looking like you're glowing, or a little bit sweaty, just depends on one's perspective, is the new beauty ideal.

Except, according to this morning's scripture, having a glowing face is nothing new. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai many thousands of years ago, his face was glowing, not because he'd visited a Sephora up there but because he had an amazing first-hand encounter with God during which he received the Ten Commandments. When he came back down his face was glowing so much that the leaders of Israel, even Moses' own brother Aaron, were afraid of him.

Can you imagine such a thing—this person who had been like you the last time you saw him and now he's back but he's glowing? It's likely the only explanation the people could muster would be that Moses had spoken with God and "something of God's glory has rubbed off on Moses, and that God's glory is visible in Moses' face."¹ The reason this would have made the Israelites afraid is because Moses had warned the people earlier to NOT do exactly what he had just done which was to climb or touch Mount Sinai because if they did, they would be put to death. (Ex. 19:12) And so it was that the people were afraid to even get close to Moses when he came off the mountain because they believed that doing so could lead to death because that's what he had told them.

But Moses, Moses calls them back, and they return to him, and he speaks to them. He tells them the things the Lord had shared with him on the mountaintop. I bet they were still a little bit nervous because Moses was still glowing. Indeed, Moses kept glowing such that, whenever he was with the people he would wear a veil, but whenever he went to be with the Lord, he removed his veil. After his encounter with God, Moses glowed because, again, "something of God's glory had rubbed off on Moses" and apparently continued to rub off on Moses in each interaction he had with God because Moses just kept glowing up.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday and we revisit this idea of glowing up in the presence of the divine with a story from the New Testament—the story of the Transfiguration as it's found in Mark's gospel.

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Peter did not know

¹ <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/exodus-3429-35-commentary/>

what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him! (Mr. 9:2-7)

There are similar themes between the stories of the Transfiguration and Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai— incredible encounters with the divine happened on the mountain tops, the glory of the Lord rubbed off on those involved and they glowed, and those who observed the glow were afraid.

Perhaps it's hard for us to relate to these stories of people glowing up in the presence of God because, as far as I know, none of us have had these kinds of mountain top experiences with God. And yet, I can't help but think that there are a fair number of you here this morning who have had some kind of experience with the divine, some kind of encounter that left you glowing because something of God's glory rubbed off on you.

I had one such experience just last week. But, instead of happening on a mountain top, it happened in a basement—our church basement to be exact. It was a gathering of our youth, their families, and mentors. The goal of the time together had been to have some food and play a fun game that would give the youth and their mentors an opportunity to reconnect. We're now a year into the youth mentoring program and I just wanted to give folks a chance to get together. But unfortunately, many peoples' schedules or illnesses kept them from participating and there were only two youth and about a dozen adults who were able to come.

At first I was disappointed that the game I had planned was no longer appropriate (a scavenger hunt/trivia combination that, no worries, I kept on file because it will be played at some point in the future). I was feeling stressed because the gathering was not what I had been expecting or planning. And yet, a fair number of people were present and, as it is written, "Where two or three are gathered . . . there the minister needs to come up with something for them to do." So instead of a silly game, we expanded on last week's children message about rejection sometimes being a form of God's protection. Each person around the table was invited to tell a story of a time they were rejected or disappointed or felt they had failed and then share how, in hindsight, that rejection, disappointment, or failure had actually led to something good happening in their lives.

I was deeply moved by the willingness of those in the group, including the youth, to be vulnerable. They shared stories from some of the hardest times in their lives with candor and sensitivity. They reflected on what had happened to them and were able to see the ways in which God had been at work in their lives, even as they talked about some of the most difficult times in life. They offered one another the gift of their trust, their vulnerability, and their deep and abiding faith that, in the end, all things are possible with God. They gave each other, and me, the gifts of hope and reassurance that, one day, in Christ, everything really is going to be okay.

As I was driving home reflecting on that time together, tears suddenly sprang to my eyes and my face began to glow, not with the glow stick I had applied earlier that day, but rather with the tears of gratitude I felt because I had gotten to be part of such a remarkable time of experiencing the presence of God manifested in the people around that table. In our time together, I assure you that something of God's glory rubbed off on me and my heart was reoriented towards love because of the way God was incarnate in the other people in that space. I thought how rare it is, in our competitive and success-idolizing culture, to get to sit around and talk about rejection and failure in a safe place. And, more importantly, to not have the stories end there. But rather, to have each person present, from teenager to septuagenarian, bear witness to the divine by sharing how God brings light out of darkness, acceptance out of rejection, and new opportunities out of what had been perceived to be dead ends.

That time gave me a chance to glow up—to glow up with God's glory. It recharged me and renewed me to begin a new week. It helped me to reflect on how I spend my time and with whom I spend my time—was I making choices that help me to glow up and share God's light in the world?

Indeed, these passages about glowing up in God's presence invite all of us to consider these things. Do the ways in which we use our time give us opportunities to glow up by spending time doing the things and being with the people that give us a chance to have God's glory rub off on us? Do the things we do and the things we say reveal God's glory to others and help them to glow up? Or, are the choices we make about what we read and watch and consume making us afraid and distancing us from the glory of God? Do the things we do and the things we say create stumbling blocks for others, casting shadows for them on their journey?

It's unlikely we're going to have the kinds of mountain top experiences these passages talk about. But, that's no reason to give up on experiencing the divine in our everyday lives. Because the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ isn't that God came to earth twice—once to Mount Sinai and once for the Transfiguration and any of us who weren't there then are out of luck. Rather, the Good News is that God's spirit dwells in us and among us, it is at work all around us. Indeed, the divine is glowing up all over the place . . . even in our church basement. And so thanks be to God that it's time to glow up!