

Your Face, Lord, Do I Seek  
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Exodus 34:29-35 (CEB)

<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.

2 Corinthians 3:7-4:2 (CEB)

<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.

<sup>4</sup> <sup>1</sup> This is why we don't get discouraged, given that we received this ministry in the same way that we received God's mercy. <sup>2</sup> Instead, we reject secrecy and shameful actions. We don't use deception, and we don't tamper with God's word. Instead, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God by the public announcement of the truth.

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It's interesting in a pastor's life how much our job is affected by the world around us. Births, deaths, marriages, graduations, - the major events in the lives of our congregants, as well as the current events happening in the world around us, both near and far. It all affects what pastors do to some degree or another; whether it be what we pray, what we preach, or simply the conversations we have during fellowship time. Such is life, at least the life of a pastor.

Today is transfiguration Sunday in the church calendar; a day that transitions us from the season of Epiphany to the season of Lent. On this day, we read about God's glory and how Moses and the Israelites were affected by it. We read about Jesus' transfiguration – the change in his appearance as he prayed on the mountaintop - and how those with him were affected **and** how it has affected others (i.e. us) since.

I began preparing today's sermon with a focus on God and Jesus' glory – it's brightness – how we are changed - and the veils that are worn, or not worn, in the presence of such luminosity. Then the world changed this week. Russia invaded Ukraine and there is now a war happening on the other side of the globe. This war will change the world, in small ways and large, and even for you and me, soon and for a quite a while into the future, I imagine. This war is unlike any wars that have occurred in the last eighty years since the end of World War II. The specifics of this war suggest a significant and frightening change in our world, from an abandonment of democracy to a rise in authoritarianism.

Rather than get too entrenched in the political and socio-economic details of this war right now, I'd like us to consider religious and spiritual perspectives. What does our faith tell us about war? As Christians who follow the way of Jesus, how might he look at this war and how can that help us in what we do?

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War is defined as “a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations,” or more generally, as “a state of hostility, conflict, or antagonism.”

[Roughly 25] years ago a group of academics and historians compiled some startling information. Since 3600 BC, the world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period, that is, during the past 5,600 years, there have been [over 14,350] wars large and small, in which [more than 3.5] billion people have been killed. The value of the property destroyed is equal to a golden belt around the entire world 97.2 miles wide and 33 feet thick.

About [35] years ago a Dutch professor calculated the cost of an enemy soldier's death at different epochs in history. He estimated that during the reign of Julius Caesar, to kill an enemy soldier cost less than \$1. At the time of Napoleon, it had considerably inflated—to more than \$2,000. At the end of the First World War, it had multiplied several times to reach the figure of some \$17,000. During the Second World War, it was about \$40,000. And in Vietnam, in 1970, to kill one enemy soldier cost the United States \$200,000. What might those costs be for Iraq and Afghanistan?

These facts and figures are frankly more sad than interesting. General William T. Sherman, in a speech in 1880, said, “There is many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory, but, boys, it is all hell.” This appears to be the basis for the quote commonly ascribed to Sherman, “War is hell.” All of us ... can testify to the veracity of Sherman's statement.<sup>1</sup> War is not glory. No one likes war and sees it as “all glory,” at least no right-minded person, in my opinion. War is a great evil that causes untold damage to individuals, families, societies, and nations. Surprisingly, war is a complicated issue that can be divisive for many people, many Americans.

Regardless of specific opinions and divisions though, the pictures and videos that are coming out of Ukraine right now are heart-wrenching and tragic. How would Jesus respond? Would he use the word glory to describe what's happening?

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from “War,” by Freddy Fritz. 7/27/08.

Jesus told us to be peacemakers. It is very important to understand that Jesus was addressing his words to individuals and not to governing authorities. Clearly, governing authorities didn't heed his teachings for they chose instead to kill him. Jesus said, "But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt 5:39). Jesus' words are part of his teaching regarding personal ethics; they are not instructions to governing authorities on how to govern or approach international relationships.

If we are to find out what the governing authorities are to do, we read about it in Romans 13:1-5, *Every person should place themselves under the authority of the government. There isn't any authority unless it comes from God, and the authorities that are there have been put in place by God. <sup>2</sup> So anyone who opposes the authority is standing against what God has established. People who take this kind of stand will get punished. <sup>3</sup> The authorities don't frighten people who are doing the right thing. Rather, they frighten people who are doing wrong. Would you rather not be afraid of authority? Do what's right, and you will receive its approval. <sup>4</sup> It is God's servant given for your benefit. But if you do what's wrong, be afraid because it doesn't have weapons to enforce the law for nothing. It is God's servant put in place to carry out his punishment on those who do what is wrong. <sup>5</sup> That is why it is necessary to place yourself under the government's authority, not only to avoid God's punishment but also for the sake of your conscience.*

The entire basis of how the governing authorities are to conduct themselves is justice. The governing authorities have been established by God, and it is the responsibility of the governing authorities to ensure that justice is maintained. As the peacemakers that Jesus has taught us to be, we are to live, as much as we can, at peace with everyone (Mark 9:50).

Jesus, the prince of peace, clearly was a realist, as far as we can tell. He never spoke as if wars would suddenly cease, but rather that they would continue until the end of time. In Mark 13 he told the disciples that "wars and reports of wars...must happen, but this isn't the end yet. Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places. These things are just the beginning of the sufferings associated with the end." In spite of all of that, we are to be peacemakers and constantly strive for the denouncement of evil and advocacy of justice. What is glorious, good, and required of us by God is to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

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We are in an odd and interesting place as we're transitioning (we hope) through a world-wide pandemic back into a normal life, only to be confronted with yet another possible life-altering event – war. War that could possible extend farther than many may anticipate.

As with all decisions in our lives, if we choose to welcome God fully into our lives and allow Jesus' teaching to penetrate our hearts and souls, then we will be better prepared to handle these overwhelming events. The glory of our God, as was seen on Moses' shining face and Jesus' glowing appearance, is how we are transformed.

In the face of difficult or scary situations and chaotic events, many people respond with fear and resistance. That's how Aaron and the Israelites reacted upon seeing Moses' shining face. They didn't see his glow as a beautiful effect of having been in the presence of God, but something that was strange, unexpected and to be feared and avoided. The brilliance was just TOO much to handle. Moses put on a veil to assuage their fears, but when Moses returned to the mountain to be with God, he removed the veil. He welcomed God's love and radiance.

In Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, he shares with us how Jesus changed HOW we are able to respond and handle such glory. Where the Israelites experienced fear, the ministry of the Spirit which we have through Jesus Christ, allows us to not only witness such glory, but **experience** even greater glories through the ministry that brings righteousness. The radical love and mercy of God frightens and even angers us. When given the opportunity to embrace peace and avoid conflict, we sometimes struggle. It easy for me to stand up here and say, make peace not war, when I'm not in the middle of this current conflict. But we've all been in the midst of conflicts, small and great, and we know that there is complexity and challenges. Making decisions of peace, justice and compassion can be easy, but they can also be hard. When we have faith in Jesus, we allow ourselves to be transformed in a way that we are free of fear and ready to take action for justice and truth. We reject a veil that will distract us from seeing the true beauty and extreme extent of God's mercy and we welcome the presence of God and Jesus into our lives.

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As we watch the world stage with fighting between Russia and Ukraine and the unfolding repercussions of war, we feel scared, sad, and tormented by the unnecessary death and destruction that has and will occur...

As we question what the future holds for all of us, considering these events, as well as the myriad of other challenges before us each and every day ...

I share with you verses from Psalm 27 and ask that you keep it near to your heart and in your prayers...for the people of Ukraine, the people of Russia and all of God's children...

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—

my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;

though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup> One thing I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:

to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,

to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.

<sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.

<sup>12</sup> Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.

<sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living.

<sup>14</sup> Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!

<sup>8</sup> “Come,” my heart says, “seek [God’s] face!”  
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

YOUR FACE, LORD, DO I SEEK.

AMEN