

Transfiguration (RCL/C): "Family Resemblance: Are We the Spitting Image of God?"
Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-43a
March 1-2, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"Who does the baby look like?" is a natural question to ask about the newborn. Sometimes even the parents can't say and have to respond, "Can't tell, really. Too soon to say." Other times the resemblance to another family member is clear as day: "He has his grandfather's red hair!" "She has her mother's cheekbones." "He has a dimple in his chin just like his dad."

Some of you may know the Amy Grant song, "Her Father's Eyes" [Father with a capital F!]:

I may not be every mother's dream for her little girl
And my face may not grace the mind of everyone in the world
But that's all right, as long as I can have one wish I pray
When people look inside my life, I want to hear them say
She's got her Father's Eyes
Her Father's Eyes
Eyes that find the good in things
When good is not around
Eyes that find the source of help
When help just can't be found
Eyes full of compassion
Seeing every pain
Knowing what you're going through
And feeling it the same
Just like my Father's Eyes
My Father's Eyes...
Just like my Father's Eyes.

Scripture tells us in many different ways that we are to see the world through the eyes of our Father in Heaven, like His Son. We are to be mini-me's of Christ, reflecting our Savior in all we say and do. People who are **not** people of faith and who know that we **are** may judge our God's heart by ours. They may make conclusions about Who our God is by who we are. If that's true, what messages are we sending?

When I lived in Illinois (the Land of Lincoln ☺) I served a Lutheran congregation that had replaced Sunday School with a midweek Christian nurture program called Wednesday Night Live! Both little and big kids were a part of it, and it included Confirmation prep for 7th & 8th graders.

One night one of the confirmands was especially rowdy and even disrespectful, so I had to peel him away from his friends and give him a stern talking to. (It was Pajama Night so I was wearing bunny slippers which didn't make the task of being the adult in the room any easier.) For some reason I thought I might get through to him by asking, "Did it ever occur to you that people may judge your **parents** by **your** behavior??" (I said this knowing that his parents are actually salt-of-the-earth folks whom everybody loved and admired.) That got his attention all right. He **shouted**, "That's not fair! This has nothing to do with them! You **can't** judge them by me!" My point, of course, was that if people **didn't** know his parents, their child's behavior could indeed reflect on them. People will judge our God by our behavior: our words, our silence, our actions, our inaction. What messages are we sending? What conclusions are others making?

This weekend's lessons are unusually tightly knit together: Moses veils his face because he shines with blinding God-light after his one-to-one audiences with the Holy One; Jesus' face and clothes blaze with God-light during His transfiguration on the mountain. St. Paul refers back to all of this when he writes to the Corinthians:

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.... (2 Cor. 3:18)

This goes beyond us being **like the moon**, reflecting the sun's light. Paul says we don't just reflect Jesus' glory, we are being transformed **into** that glory. It's like the moon beginning to **look like** the sun, not just shining with its light. We are to "look like" Christ, by acting like Christ.

We're more apt to act like Christ if we recognize the image of God in every human being. We Christians have inherited from our Jewish brothers and sisters this belief that the image of God is imprinted on every person. In *the amen effect* Rabbi Sharon Brous writes:

[A] Rabbinic text... from the 9th century declares that every person is accompanied, at all times, by a procession of angels crying out, "Make way, for an image of the Holy One is

approaching!” Every person, like royalty. And yet, again and again, the image of the Holy One is controlled and contained, humiliated and degraded, incarcerated and incapacitated, shot and killed before our very eyes. How do we keep missing all those angels, with their trumpets and proclamations, desperate to rouse us to the dignity of every human being?¹

She really brings that home when she reflects, “In my city, Los Angeles, 42,000 images of God slept on the street last night – a stain on our collective conscience.”² Jesus must agree, because when He tells the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, He says:

*⁴¹ Then [the king] will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did **not** do it to one of the least of these [who are members of my family], you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.’*

Lent begins this coming Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. *Lent* gets its name from the *lengthening* of the hours of sunlight during this time of year in the Northern Hemisphere. The presence of light is associated with the presence of God. Moses’ and Jesus’ glowing faces remind us of this, but so does Nature herself. Watching the sun rise over the ocean, seeing rays of sunlight pierce the clouds, can be mystical, prayer-full experiences. Even the warmth of the sun shining through a window onto the face and bed of someone recuperating from illness is a valentine from God. It’s not just the sun shining! It’s God! In the words of Psalm 80 we pray:

^{1b}You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth...

³Restore us, O God;

let your face shine, that we may be saved...

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

The great blessing of Moses’ brother Aaron is, “... **the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.**” (Numbers 6:25)

Our first lesson from Exodus about Moses coming back down the mountain all aglow is the end of the golden calf story about the Israelites getting nervous when Moses spent 40 days on the mountain the 1st time ‘round, and how they got busy melting down their jewelry, creating a golden calf and cavorting around it in worship. Moses “had a cow” when he saw their idolatry and smashed the ten commandments God had given him. Moses was so angry he actually asked God to kill all of those idolaters. God talked Moses off the ledge during a 2nd trip up the mountain, replaced the tablets with a new set, and sent Moses back to base camp again. A Jewish commentary reads the radiance on Moses’ face as confirmation that the people are once again in God’s good graces: light as God’s presence **and** God’s favor. The Jewish commentary also says the “afterglow... reaffirms [Moses’] role as the unique intimate of God, the sole and singular mediator between God and his people....”³ For us, of course, **Jesus** is “the sole and singular mediator between God and his people,” the Son of God, our great High Priest.

Lent is called “the springtime of the soul.” It may seem odd that this holy time of rebirth, fresh growth, new beginnings, hope, begins with ashes traced on our foreheads in the shape of a cross, and the reminder: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Rebirth still requires repentance, just like it did for the Israelites in the wilderness over 3,000 years ago. During this Lent, the upcoming 40-day-springtime-of-our-souls, may we receive grace to repent of our failures in love, to draw closer to our Christ, to act **like** our Christ, seeing through our Father’s eyes, more and more recognizing the image of God in every human being, and treating them accordingly. Then, **if** people judge our God by our behavior, it will be a **good** thing. Amen

¹Sharon Brous, *the amen effect: Ancient Wisdom to Mend Our Broken Hearts and World* (NY: Avery, 2024), p. 53.

Ibid, p. 52.

³*Etz Hayim: Torah & Commentary* (Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p. 545.

