

“The new Moses”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Exodus 34:29-35 and Luke 9:28-36

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I have a confession to make. There have been times when I have not immediately cleared our sidewalks of snow. Sometimes it has taken me a few days. Before you all grab your pitchforks and prepare to drive me out of town, I have good news: I’ve been doing much better this year.

Last year, during one of our heavy snowfalls, when I had been slow to clear our sidewalks, we looked out the window and saw that a young man was clearing our sidewalks for us. We figured he was probably the son or grandson of the older lady who lives next door to us. We also figured that he probably was under the impression that Betsy, the older woman who used to occupy our house, was still living there—and that he thought he was clearing snow for an older, disabled woman, not a young couple simply too lazy to do it themselves. We suddenly felt a wave of shame; however, not enough to go out and tell him. Instead, we hid until he finished.

Sometimes there are benefits to not being seen. Someone, for instance, might clear your sidewalk, not knowing who you are.

But most of the time, not being seen is painful. It is a fundamental human desire to be seen as we are. Not as a stereotype, not as someone’s idea about us, but as a complex, irreducible individual worthy of love—in short, a child of God.

Whether you’re waiting in line to get food stamps, or sitting alone in a nursing home, or going through airport security with your hijab, it is painful to be invisible. Our United Methodist family is experiencing this pain right now. This week, the second largest Protestant denomination in our nation voted to double-down on its understanding of homosexuality as sinful and its punishment and exclusion of churches and pastors who are seen as out of bounds. There are a lot of LGBTQ Methodists who are feeling unseen right now. And it hurts.

It begs the question: how often do we really see each other? How often do we stop to behold the divine, the wondrous, the beautiful, the unique in the other? How often do we walk past someone, or even spend a life with someone, without ever really seeing them at all?

And it begs another question: if we have so much trouble seeing each other, how good do you think we are at seeing Jesus? Do we really know this man, this Son of God, whose name we profess every Sunday?

At this point in the Gospel of Luke, even the disciples did not really know Jesus. They had walked with him, eaten with him, shared some of life’s most dangerous and intimate moments, and still they did not understand—not completely. They still saw Jesus through their narrow expectations of a savior.

In this same chapter, people have been asking, “Who is this guy called Jesus?” Some have suggested he’s a resurrected John the Baptist; others have said he’s Elijah or one of the ancient prophets. No one can figure him out.

So Jesus takes a few of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—up a mountain to pray. There, Jesus’ appearance changes, and maybe for the first time the disciples see the truth of this man who has walked alongside them for three years. They see God in this man. They see the law and the prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah. They see a man who is prepared to love them to the point of death and beyond. They see the beauty of this man that the busyness of daily life so easily obscured.

A voice then comes from the clouds to help them see this man even better, the voice of God, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen, my Beloved; listen to him!” God tells them who Jesus is, and then God gives them a simple recipe to know Jesus. God says, “Listen to him!” That’s it. Stop asking all the wrong people who he is and start asking him. Stop trying to cram him into your ready-made assumptions, and just listen to him. If you listen, you will see him.

You will see in Jesus a new Moses.

Like Moses he goes up a mountain; he is transfigured and shines; he is proclaimed God’s chosen one; he is set on a quest to set his people free and teach them the will of God; he is the answer to God hearing his people cry out in suffering.

And just in case we still don’t get it, the Gospel authors even put Moses right there on that mountain with Jesus.

This tells us three things about Jesus. First, to see Jesus is to see the whole history of God’s people, New Testament and Hebrew Bible. Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected a Jewish man. He doesn’t contrast with the Old Testament; like the prophets before him, he’s its true believer, and he’s here to show us how we’ve twisted the Law laid down by Moses. Supersessionism, this belief that Christianity has bested or replaced Judaism, has no place in his life or in ours; he’s not here to replace Moses; he’s here to continue his work.

Second, to see Jesus is also to see how Jesus is different from Moses; he is unique. In Exodus, Moses is the only one who hears God; he alone goes up the mountain. But Jesus takes Peter, John, and James with him. The disciples see his glory. They are scared, just as the Israelites were. But this time, God doesn’t speak to God’s servant. God speaks to all present. In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid but to rise and look.

Moses helped us understand God (he communicated God’s teachings), but Jesus helped us meet God (he communicated the person of God).

John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.”

Third, and perhaps most important for this sermon, we see in Jesus a mission, like that of Moses, to help us see, not only him, but each other and God. Moses reminded the Israelites who they were and to whom they belonged. Many had forgotten; years of slavery and invisibility will do that to you. Some had even begun to believe the lies told to them by their Egyptian masters. The exodus that Moses offered them wasn't simply from the tangible chains of oppression; it was from invisibility. He offered them the chance to see themselves, and be seen, as who they really were, the children of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And this is what Jesus offers us. He remembers to us the identity of a God, and a people, we have forgotten through years of slavery (to sin, to suffering, to separation).

This is the gospel: when we take the time to see Jesus, to see him as he truly is, our eyes are opened and we are suddenly able to see each other and ourselves as we truly are.

Frederick Buechner writes, "Even with us something like this happens once in a while. The face of the man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread, of sometimes even the most unlikely person listening to a concert or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in, or just having a beer at a Saturday baseball game in July. Every once and so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing."

This week I have seen Methodist churches defiantly post rainbow flags. I have seen gay pastors, friends of mine in the Methodist church, proudly proclaim their identity for all to see. I have seen ally pastors refuse to be blind to the humanity, and the divinity, within the LGBTQ family. I have seen Methodists, rainbow clad and smiling, link arms and sing, "Draw the circle wide." And I have seen a young, gay man from upstate New York bring the Methodist conference to their feet as he passionately asked them to see him and so many others who didn't know God could love them because their churches said God didn't, who shouted, "We are the church; we are God's children."

I tell you, his face shined. The faces around that circle shined. A transfiguration. An opportunity to listen and let them tell us who they are. Because Jesus, like Moses before him, gave us the chance to see them real.

And maybe even more than that, to love them real. Amen.