

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**March 3, 2019, Transfiguration Sunday**  
 Exodus 34:29-35, Luke 9:28-36  
**FACE TIME**

face to face	clock face
take an about face	face cards
I recognize your face	a sea of faces
on the face of things	type face
fall on your face	face off
watch face	face lift
two-faced	face mask
face first	losing face
full in the face	saving face
the look on your face	facing each other
facing up to reality	face time
too many new faces	

So much of what makes us human beings involves our faces. This became even clearer to me when I made this morning's list.

When we are face to face with another person, we are able to see and understand each other at deeper levels than we can when we are: connected by phones, or texts, or snapchat, or twitter, or e-mail or even a good old-fashioned card or letter.

From our earliest days on earth we are focused on the faces of our mothers and fathers and caregivers. In seminary I studied the psychology of human development with a wonderful professor named Dr. Loder.

I will never forget his lecture on very early infancy. He talked about how very young infants grow to quickly recognize the face their mothers and fathers.

He talked about a baby's perspective, when the focus of their vision is on the face that they know. The mother's or father's face helps define the baby's world. There is nothing more beautiful than that face, my professor said. That known face is the child's whole world.

Then he added: It is with this kind of attention that we are called to look upon the face of God. Just as a mother knows the face of her child so completely, that is how God knows each one of us. Seeing the love of a mother or father as they gaze down into that face of their child, is just a glimpse of the incredible love on the face of God as God looks into each of our faces.

The baby knows she or he is safe in the presence of the parent's face,  
 and we are called to learn that same kind of complete trust,  
 When we are seen by our God we are completely safe,  
 and we are always seen by our God's love.  
 Nothing can separate us from that love.

God has made it very clear from our earliest stories of God and humanity in the Bible that God wants to know us face to face.

The Bible makes it clear that there is a great mystery when we are face to face with God.

This morning we heard about Moses coming face to face with God. In the chapter before this morning's story we learn that (33:4f) Moses used to go out to the tent of meeting to be with God. When the people of Israel looked out to this tent they knew that God was present when the cloud of God's presence was in front of the tent

They knew that God was speaking to Moses when this pillar of cloud that had led them through the wilderness came to rest outside the tent.

We read in Exodus 33:11 that "...the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."

Then in chapter 34 we learn that whenever God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai, Moses' face was shining when he returned to the people. And they were afraid of him, because his face was changed by his conversations with God.

And Moses wore a veil over his face when he was with the people, but whenever he returned to speak to God he removed the veil.

Moses' very face reflected the power of the conversations he had with God.

Moses was changed by talking to God.

Then we move to the New Testament and another face to face story on a different mountain. Jesus was on a mountain praying with his disciples. Just eight days before he had begun to tell his disciples that of what was coming when they went to Jerusalem. Jesus said: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

As he was with them there on the mountain his face began to change and his clothes became dazzling white. Like the face of Moses after speaking to God, Jesus' face began to shine.

And suddenly Moses and Elijah are there with Jesus on that mountain and they begin to discuss Jesus' departure from the earth. ("exodus," cf 04)

The presence of Moses and Elijah would have told the disciples that Moses the Law-giver and Elijah, one of their most cherished prophets, stood for the truth of what Jesus said was about to happen when he went to Jerusalem.

Then the cloud descended on the mountain, just as the cloud of God's presence descended in the time of Moses. And the disciples are absolutely terrified. And how could they not be terrified. They watched Jesus' face change as God came near, and not only his face but his very clothes began to shine as though somehow lit from the inside.

"Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Beloved, My Chosen; listen to him. When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone." (vv. 35-36)

Moses and Jesus were face to face with God.

This is the last Sunday before we enter the season of Lent and prepare to once again be face to face with Jesus' sacrifice, death and resurrection.

Let us pay attention this morning to what it means that we enter this season of Lent being reminded of the mystery of the face to face presence of God.

Because that face to face love is for each one of us. The face of God shines on us too.

Like children gazing into the face of their mother or father, we are called to gaze into the face of our Eternal Parent God, and know that no matter what happens in these next days of Lent, we are loved.

No matter how alienating, and painful it is to once more journey to Jerusalem with Jesus, remembering the Last Supper, Jesus' agonized prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the soldiers coming to arrest Jesus following after Judas's kiss, the verbal and physical violence by those who held Jesus, the walk to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, and Jesus' crucifixion on the cross...no matter how our lives are touched this year by the journey to Jerusalem and the cross, the message of salvation on the cross is for each of us.

In the cross AND the empty tomb we are reminded that God came to be face to face with us in Jesus so that we would always know the saving face to face love of God for us.

We are the children of God who know that the story does not end on the cross, but with the empty tomb.

We are children who can look with trust into the loving face of Christ and know that we have seen the loving face of our God whose words reach forward to us from that mountain in Palestine long ago:

"This is my Son, my Beloved, My Chosen; listen to him."

With the trust of an infant gazing into the face of her father or into the face of his mother,

Let us keep our eyes on the face of God

and trust these coming days of Lent to God our Parent,

whose love for us will never let us go.

May the focus of our vision be on God's face.

May that be what helps us define the world around us.

Just as a parent's face defines an infant's world,

may God's loving face define our daily living and daily journey through Lent.

Because moment by moment, day by day,

God is looking into your face with love,

And saying to you: you are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter,

With you I am well-pleased