

LAST EPIPHANY C 2025

Transfiguration

Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church

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I'm a bit of a fan of television shows and movies that deal with the supernatural. Be they somewhat campy, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or the show named "Supernatural," I like watching the special effects and the often fun interpretation of the material. Lately, instead of watching the news, I've been opting for something a bit less depressing, so I've been watching reruns of the show *Grimm*. At least, in the forty-minute span of the show, the good guys come out ahead, even if they are a bit scratched-up.

In the show *Supernatural*, one season focused on heaven being closed and all the angels suddenly cast down to earth. They remain spiritual beings while searching for a willing, or maybe sometimes not-so-willing human being to inhabit. Some of those humans volunteer, eager to be not just touched, but possessed by an angel. But there's a problem. Some of the more eager ones don't consider a major side effect of being inhabited by the glory of an angel. If they're not truly worthy, they explode. That does a lot more than just make a mess of the carpet.

That was a consideration of those gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai. As the descendants of Jacob who bear his name, Israel, approach the mountain, its peak is shrouded in a dark cloud. Lightning flashes, and the ground trembles with the presence of its Creator. The people beg Moses to intercede for them, for coming too close to God, even catching a quick glimpse, will result in death.

It's even a bit much for Moses, whose very being is transformed after standing in the nearer presence of God. His followers are so afraid that Moses has to start wearing a veil when he's with them. He removes the veil when he's in God's presence, like a simple veil could prevent God from seeing Moses.

Fast forward a few millennia, and we have the story of Jesus going onto a mountain to pray. He takes three of his closest friends with him, who witness a strange event. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear, and speak with Jesus, who is himself transformed, or as the word of the day puts it, transfigured before their very eyes. Even his clothing is changed in a way that would make the Oxyclean guy jealous. Peter speaks up, and then the voice of God is heard. "This is my Son. Listen to him!"

Then just as suddenly, everything appears to be normal. Not like going through that experience is ever going to let things go back to how they were, mind you. In some versions of this story, Jesus tells his companions to keep quiet about what they've seen. Luke tells us they choose to not tell anyone. They probably needed a lot more time to process the events of the evening.

I imagine we would need some time, too. I mean, how do you tell others about seeing the very glory of God suddenly filling a person you've been hanging around with for some time? In fact, how do you describe the glory of God in the first place? An attribute of the One who by definition cannot be defined is pretty much itself indescribable.

But we don't give up. Glory is not just an attribute of God. It is an accompanying sign that God is present. Dark clouds, lightning and thunder, and earthquakes may not simultaneously occur, but as much as we might in human form, we sense that something is different, and that everything is suddenly changed.

I've known some who say they can see auras. Personally, I seem to be more adept at noticing the absence of such things as halos than observing them around others. Maybe some are more attuned to those things. Sometimes I wonder if they're simply trying to make an impression, much like many whom I've heard trying to pray in tongues but who seem to repeat nonsense syllables in a noticeable pattern.

That's between them and God. But in a way, the effect is to do the same thing the people of Israel asked Moses to do. The effect of the presence of God is veiled, often to the point that no one else notices that God was even in the neighborhood. And, if God really wanted to show up and be fully known, I'm pretty sure God could do that despite our attempts to shield ourselves and others.

Charles Wesley wrote some familiar words about all this. We sing them at least once a year: "Veiled in flesh the God-head see. Hail the incarnate Deity." It's easy for us to explain all this away by making it only about Jesus. You probably have figured out by now that I think there's more to it than that, not that that isn't enough.

We veil ourselves in many ways to keep a safe distance from the glory of God, the presence of our Creator. We hide behind tradition, our limited understanding of the nature of God's being, even ceremonial garb to present ourselves before others even as we claim to speak and act for God. Like I've said, it's not that God can't show up despite all that and accomplish what God desires. God is already known to work around our veils of gender and identity and skin color. Even the veil of age can't inhibit the glory of God. Just ask Sarah and Abraham about that when you get a chance.

I think our most dense veils are those we see with limited eyes, placing them on others. We choose to not see the glory of God in the poor and needy, the sick and suffering, even those who linger at the threshold of death. We want to see the glory of God in wealth and power and the wielding thereof. But John's Gospel, and Paul's teaching, puts the full manifestation of the glory of God on a lonely hill outside Jerusalem, where a cross stood to reveal who God is for us.

But God didn't stop there. Death itself was transfigured during those three awful days. Because not even the captivity of death, or a dank, smelly tomb, could hold back the real glory of God. When we consider that, it makes our attempts at veiling God's presence seem quite silly.

So, once we get it together, it's time to tell anyone who will listen about our experiences of the glory of God. It's time to rip off the veils we wear, and force others to put on, and let God's presence shine through and around us. We've waited long enough.