

## **Exodus 34:29-35**

29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup>When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup>But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

<sup>32</sup>Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup>When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; <sup>34</sup>but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup>the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

## **Luke 9:28-43a**

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>Just then a man from the crowd shouted, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.’ <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, ‘You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.’ <sup>42</sup>While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup>And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

### **The Unmentioned Demons**

What a pair of powerful passages we have today. Moses having this theophany, this blinding experience with God, veiling his face because the people were afraid to come near it – few people, they believed, ever came so near to God, and none closer than Moses. Two of the Gospels have the account of Jesus going up the mountain, but not alone, and having his face start to glow, and Moses and Elijah talking with him, and Peter babbling about set up some booths, and God telling them all to listen to his Son. Pretty awe-inspiring stories I would say, and perhaps someday I’ll talk about that primal fear that people have of God, by I want to move ahead in our Gospel lesson to one other amazing episode contained in these readings. This is the

one about the healing of the boy possessed by the demon. Jesus, Peter, James, and John are coming down the mountain when they come upon a brouhaha in a village where Jesus' other disciples have attempted but failed to heal this boy. Jesus scolds everyone it seems – since he seems to be addressing the entire generation - then heals the boy, restores him to his father, and the crowd is in awe. We see this as a happy ending, but Jesus saw this as unfinished business. I don't know if we can fully comprehend what exactly was going on with this boy. I've been a boy, and I've fathered a boy, and I've counseled boys, and I've seen things that really scared me, kids pulling knives, packing guns, and I don't think this boy in today's story is anywhere near as scary as them. This boy is being beaten and lashed around by whatever possessed him. The scripture calls it a demon. Today I want us to look closely at this passage so that we may gain a clear understanding of what is really happening in this story. Particularly I want to know why Jesus was so angry with the crowd? I mean, if I were in the crowd, I might ask, "Why is that guy so angry with me?" "Who is he? He's not from around here. Must be from Brooklyn." I might shout back at the guy, except that I see that he just healed that boy and restored him to his father...maybe now's not a time to pick a fight."

You see where I'm going. We can't help but hear Jesus yelling at us, and it's one thing to take it like a sheep because it's Jesus yelling at us, but if he is yelling at us, I want to know what he's yelling for. And that's where I felt extremely blessed this week as I looked at this passage, and things started to jump out at me, and I realized that there is an unmentioned demon in our story that we should take note of.

Notice that Jesus rebukes the demon in the boy.

Jesus also rebukes the crowd.

Could there be a demon in the crowd with the same destructive capacity as the demon in the boy, or perhaps a more powerful demon, or perhaps a whole legion of demons?

Jesus rebukes the crowd.

Demons have one thing in common: they all work to sap life out of humans, but some work within, and some work without. Some destroy the individual, and some take down others at the same time. Note that the demon within the boy dashes the boy to the ground, and mauls him and makes him shriek and foam at the mouth yet it doesn't lift a finger against others. Without Jesus' intervention, this boy might have killed himself and himself alone. Are there not worse demons that like to cause a lot of collateral damage?

Jesus rebukes the crowd.

Oh yes, there are demons in the crowd, unchecked demons. Demons that might cause us to feel subtly but vastly superior to this epileptic child, say that he's different but think that somewhere in this child or his family there must have been something terrible, something shameful to be cursed so. Who hasn't known a bully who mocked and ridiculed some poor child who displays some less-than-normal behavior? Do all bullies grow up? Absolutely not. Is it possible for bullies to congregate, to be a crowd. Absolutely yes.

Jesus rebukes the crowd.

And if he rebukes the crowd, we need to ask ourselves that question: Am I the crowd? And by extension, is there a demon within me?

And if so, what kind of demon?

I've already mentioned the first type, but I should speak a little more of this one because there can be an interplay between the different types of demons. While one person is led to feelings of utter worthlessness that would drive him/her to suicide, another person is led to slander and ridicule and in various ways diminish another person, to make that person feel worthless. In the end, both people are destroyed. The victim dies from losing a sense of worth. The winner doesn't die but is enslaved to the notion that he must always stay on top, whatever he thinks 'the top' is. Sometimes 'the top' is always having the last word. Sometimes 'the top' is flaunting your education to remind people that you're smarter than them. Sometimes 'the top' means having power over others, power that you can demonstrate in order to keep everyone in line. And through it all we learn that the top is a very lonely place to be.

That's the grand scheme of the unmentioned demons. He kills you slowly as he kills those who you perceive to be your enemies.

This sort of demon also manifests itself in our prejudice and bigotry as we convince ourselves that we are better or more worthy than those who are different from us. This sort of behavior leads us to enslave or exploit others, and while all these actions seem to be directed outward, in ways that take from others, the behavior also works to take life from ourselves, since nothing that we take from others serves in any way to enhance ourselves. Those who operate under the influence of this sort of demon are blind and most pitiable since their every effort to gain more things, more power, more land, more acclaim, are futile, because when we do stand before God he will be unimpressed by any of those things. Instead he may ask, "What were you thinking, my child?"

And thus we get to the crux of the message for this Transformation Sunday. We are, as our Communion liturgy will assert, "freed for joyful obedience" to God. We are freed from demons if we place our faith in Jesus Christ and follow his lead. In fact, today's Gospel lesson really illustrates the entire weekly pattern of a Christian's life (thank you, David Lose, for your recent commentary: <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/transfiguration-c-worship-transfigured/>). It begins on the eighth day, that is Sunday, resurrection day, the day after the Sabbath or seventh day, they went up to the mountain to pray. Where do we come together to pray? You guessed it: the church. Where do we see Christ transfigured? Where do we meet Moses the Lawgiver and Elijah the great prophet together with Christ? The church, where scripture is expounded, where Moses and Elijah are honored, and where we hear the voice of God say to us, "This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him!" We may not see Jesus quite the same way that Luke describes here, but in a symbolic way we do. We see Jesus as God's own Son, and as our Lord and our Savior.

And when you leave church, when you come down that mountain and back into the community, what are we supposed to do? Be among the crowd that mocks and belittles and excludes and preys upon one another? No! We are to be the ones who cast out the demons, who restore children to their parents. We are to be the voice that declares, "You faithless and perverse

generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" Then on the eighth day, we gather on the mountaintop, in the church, where once again we pray, we hear God's voice, and we glorify Jesus Christ. So once again we can go into the world and advance the healing process.

I dare anyone to declare this at St. George Ferry Terminal. But I wonder if we don't hear it sometimes in our own hearts. Where has my faith been lately? In what ways have I perverted reason and logic to justify my own sin? Am I among those who sit back cynically and watch it all happen, or am I being called to make a stand, to do something?

And here is an appropriate place to end this sermon. We begin the season of Lent on Wednesday. Lent was a time of spiritual pilgrimage for new converts to the Christian faith beginning in the fifth century, also a time of fasting, commemorating the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. It's a time of prayer, reflection, and repentance. It's a time for us to remove whatever it is that may be inhibiting us from being the healers we are called to be, from confronting the injustices we observe day to day, from intervening when we see bullying of any scale going on. You know one of the biggest perks to being a Christian is? Job security! There is no shortage of work for us to do in this world, a lot in our own backyards but also a lot over those ponds we call oceans. Lent is a time for the Holy Spirit to direct you to the mission that God has designated for you, and perhaps our church has a venue for you to enter that ministry. Perhaps you have an idea for establishing a ministry. Whatever way God has called you to be an agent of healing, go for it. And may you have abundant life in Jesus Christ. Amen.