

Shining

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November 25, 2001

Bible Reading

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, he was not aware that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 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, 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 God. (*Exodus 34:29–35*)

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 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.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 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. (*Luke 9:28-36*)

Reading from Swedenborg

“Moses was not aware that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” refers to the inward level of the Bible within the outward, which shines forth without the outward level grasping it. We should understand that “the inward things in the Bible shining out into the outward” means the inner meaning within the outward meaning.

The inner meaning constantly shines forth and scintillates in the outward meaning. However, no one notices this except those who have attained to the inner meaning. People who focus on the outward things that contain the inward ones—who are religious on a more surface level—do not notice it. Yet it is still there with-out their knowing it, and does touch them. . . .

But when people are interested only in the outward meaning, without the inner meaning—as the nation of Israel was at that time—they can't stand the inner meaning, nor the light that flows into the outward meaning from it. That is why it says in the next few verses that they were afraid to approach Moses, and that when Moses spoke to them, he put a veil over his face.

The inner meaning shines out because it contains the type of divine truth that exists in heaven. Divine truth flowing out from the Lord is seen by the angels as light. In fact, divine truth is the light of heaven. (*Arcana Coelestia* #10691)

Sermon

Not long ago there was a movie done about a man who performed admirably in spite of his difficult childhood and medical challenges. It was a movie about a man who played piano, and it was called *Shine*.

I have no intention of saying anything more about that movie, other than to recommend it, and to point out that the language of the Transfiguration story has become common usage. When someone is performing well, working efficiently and with style, we say that they are “shining.” And there are “rising stars,” blinding us with their “brilliance.” This has been said of many different individuals in many different disciplines throughout history. It can be said of communities as well.

Having said that, let me suggest that as individuals and as a community, we are called upon to shine. We mentioned in the children's message this morning that since all people have God's light within them, everyone shines to a certain extent. And the song we sang, “This Little Light of Mine,” suggests that some-times we feel compelled to hide our light from each other.

Why is that? God's light is such a beautiful thing when we let it shine through! Why do we want to hide it under a bushel basket, metaphorically speaking? As strange as it sounds, maybe we don't let our light shine because we have such a hard time seeing each other's light. After all, what business do we have shining when those around us aren't shining?

To explain this, let me take an example from real life. It's been my observation, in the services I've led in various churches, that many individuals have a difficult time with the singing part of worship. I have sensed tension and awkwardness, and a supreme effort made to sing more quietly than the musical accompaniment— which is especially difficult when we're singing a cappella! I've heard some beautiful voices coming through; yet many prefer to sing into their songbook, or not sing at all. I can't count the number of one-on-one conversations I've had where people say that they don't sing well—even going so far as to say that they can't carry a tune in a bucket.

Let's bear in mind that although there are many Psalms that encourage us to sing, not one of them tells us that we have to get all the notes right. We do not shine because our performance is perfect; we shine because we are filled with joy!

There is another image from the movies that conveys this specific point. In *The Accidental Tourist*, there is a scene in which Gina Davis is washing dishes and singing at the top of her lungs. William Hurt, who plays a very reserved and repressed writer, watches her from the doorway in complete awe, wondering

how on earth this woman managed to sing hitting every note except the right one. He was learning what she already knew: that the act of singing doesn't have to be for the purpose of dazzling everyone with our operatic precision. We sing because we need to express the joy that we feel.

Yet so many of us, when it comes time to sing, hide our light. We sing low and quietly, if at all, hoping that everyone else is so involved in the music that they aren't listening to us. We are so concerned about how people will perceive us if they hear us that we forget that God invites us to shine.

What is true for us as individuals is also true for us as a church. We can get really wrapped up in making certain that we do everything that people expect a church to do. We can hope that we will do it well enough that people will be in awe of what a nice little church we are. We can be overly concerned with not upsetting people too much, because after all, we want them to come back.

This puts us in the same position Moses was in. Moses' calling was to lead the people and help them on their journey. Nowhere in the entire Exodus story did Moses come before God anxious because people didn't like him. Being liked wasn't one of his priorities. He was there to perform a very specific task: to get these people to the Promised Land.

When he was centered in that goal, Moses was an excellent leader. He shone as a leader. The Bible story relates a few instances where he was uncertain in his position, and where he made some mistakes. In fact, it was due to one of these bad decisions that he was not permitted to enter into the Promised Land himself.

One of these errors in judgment, in my opinion, may have been that he found it necessary to wear a veil. The people had such a problem with his shining that he felt he had to hide it from them. That veil was his "bushel basket." But note that he removed the veil in the presence of God. He approached God unashamed and unapologetic. And if we accept what our theology teaches— that we are always in the presence of God—why do we insist on veiling ourselves? Why do we not let others see us shine?

Our calling here is simply this: reconnect with the joy that we feel, and shine with it!

When you can let yourself do that, here's what will happen: there will be some who will want to move away from you a little bit. Don't let that bother you. It is only because they are uncomfortable with their own light, and they are afraid to come out from under their particular bushel basket. Others, though, will be drawn to you when you let yourself shine. They will be summoned into your community by the joy that you are expressing. They will wonder, and perhaps even feel brave enough to ask, what you have discovered that enables you to shine so well.

When they ask, do not be ashamed to tell them that it is the same light that shines within them. It is light that was meant to be set free so that it can enlighten the world. It is the light of God's magnificent love. That's the reality. In spite of our fears, our uncertainties and every flat note we hear ourselves sing—or think we hear—that light cannot be hidden.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
Come into God's presence with singing.
For the Lord is good,
God's steadfast love endures forever

And God's faithfulness is to all generations.
(Psalm 100:1, 2, 5)
Shine!

Prayer

Lord, this world can be a beautiful place in every season. It is beauty that often goes unnoticed. But when we tear ourselves from our busy schedules, we are in awe of the grandeur of your presence. We are aware of the beauty around us, but seldom do we let ourselves admit that the beauty exists within us as well.

Lord, help us to shine. Help us to connect with your love, which emanates light and warmth like a candle flame within our spirit. Help us to embrace that light and warmth and allow it to shine through our skin. Though the joy you implant in us is often veiled by our doubt and our fear, we know that it can never be extinguished. And so we ask you to help us remember that when we can express that joy without apology, we are helping you to help the world find its joy. Amen.