

What would you do when faced with the Glory of God? How would you feel when you unexpectedly find yourself in the presence of the holy? How would you know you're in the presence of the Holy? How would you know that you're a witness to the miraculous, the spectacular, the Glory of God? What would you do when faced with the Glory of God?

One of my favourite quotes is from an epic poem, by Elizabeth Barret Browning, called "Aurora Leigh." At the end of her poem, Elizabeth Barret Browning writes my favourite lines:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,

I love the story of Moses and the Glory of God in the burning bush – Exodus 3 and 4. Moses is off herding his family's sheep when he looks around and notices a bush that's on fire. That may not be such an unusual thing. But he takes a closer look – and the voice of God speaks to him – "Take off your shoes, Moses! You're standing on holy ground!"

In Exodus 3 we read: And God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '*I Am* has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." This is the first time we hear the Name of God mentioned in the Bible.

God calls out to Moses...and he says, Uhhh,...No.

¹¹ Then Yahweh said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?" ¹² Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

¹³ But Moses said, "O, please send someone else."

Then Yahweh got really angry. MOSES! Your brother Aaron is a good speaker. You will tell him what to say and I WILL TELL YOU. He will be YOUR mouth and You will be My mouth and I will be with both your mouths.

Moses had a little trouble ...

What would *you* do when faced with the Glory of God?

I love the story of Job, well, I don't love the beginning and what happens to him and his family. Basically, the guy loses everything that he has loved on a bet between Yahweh and the Accuser. Would Job remain loyal to God or would Job curse God?

Job's wife and friends encouraged him to do the easy thing and blame God for everything terrible that had happened. However, Job remained stalwart – thinking and wondering what to do. After a while, God appeared to Job and questioned him through the whirlwind. "Do you know how and when and where mountain goats have their babies? Do you know where I keep the storehouses of snow? If you know this, then tell me!"

What did Job do when faced with the Glory of God?

Job answered Yahweh: “God you are all powerful. Forgive me for questioning your motives and speaking out of turn. I didn’t know you before – but now, I see your Glory and I am awestruck.”

What would you *do* when faced with the Glory of God?

I love the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. There she is, minding her own business and all of a sudden there’s a bright light and a glowing being and words of assurance. “Greetings favoured one! Yahweh has noticed you.” ... Wait! Don’t be afraid.” And, by the way, you’re going to be pregnant with God’s son.

That’s a lot to take in all at once. I can imagine that Mary would feel quite afraid. Not only is there a glowing figure – a messenger from God, no less, standing in the room and talking to her – but the messenger is relaying something – completely unimaginable.

“What? How can that be?” And then the angel proceeds to tell her and Mary, perhaps with some trepidation, welcomes the Glory of God to form and grow and become inside her. And what an honour – to know and grow and birth God’s promise. And Mary pondered all these things – and the Glory of God that she witnessed in Jesus’ ministry – pondered them all in her heart. I like that – she thought about it a lot – wondered and probably prayed about what she learned.

What *would* you do when faced with the Glory of God?

After the multiple parables about seeds and growing things – that we heard last Sunday, the gospel of Mark takes us through a cycle of miracles – all of which point to the Glory of God. The disciples new a lot about Jesus here. He told them stories and they started to understand a little of what he was saying but it likely didn’t really compute in their brains.

It begins with Mark 4:35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

And this is when it hits them. Jesus turns around and looks at his disciples – “Guys,” he says, “why are you so afraid, do you STILL have no faith? I mean, STILL? What more evidence do you need?”

And with those words, the disciples were struck with...well with something. Could they name it? It seems like the whole of the gospels were written to help people understand that – yes – the Glory of God was shown through Jesus. In this account, the disciples, when faced with the glory of God, were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

What would you do when *faced* with the Glory of God?

The interesting thing to note about this question that they ask is that it is answered in the very next scene in Mark when Jesus and the disciples get to the other side of the sea of Galilee. But it is not Jesus nor his disciples who answer, “Who then is this?”

On the other side of the lake, they meet a man who had been possessed by demons for many years. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”

The disciples were witness to all the Glory of God lived through Jesus in his actions, sermons, parables, and miracles – he just calmed the storm! – and still they could not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Yet even from far away the man who was possessed by a demon recognized the power and the Glory of God in Christ.

After the demons were cast out, the man went and proclaimed to all who would hear what Jesus, the son of God had done for him, and everyone was amazed. He was one of Christ’s first evangelists.

What would you do when faced with the Glory of God?

In Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus is portrayed in such a way that those who listen or read for the first time will wonder what will happen next. If we don’t already know the whole of the story, then these gospels leave us, like the disciples, with a sense of bewilderment, awe and wonder.

I spoke with someone the other day, who came to know the story of Christ as an adult by reading the gospels. He was truly delighted and conflicted and shocked and disturbed by Jesus’ teaching and life events. He was so upset at the death of Jesus that he closed the Bible and didn’t pick it up for a while. When he did – oh the joy in learning that death was not the end – and he reveled in the mystery with the women at the tomb, the disciples at Emmaus, and Thomas who needed proof.

Here was someone faced with the Glory of God. And what did he do? He lived the story – it became a part of him and he – a part of it.

What about us? What happens when we read the stories of Jesus? If you read or listen to the stories of Jesus and all you see is someone who is always friendly and smiles, who never speaks a rough word, who is the world’s #1 nice guy, I’m not sure you’ve really heard the gospel. Then I’m not sure whether you have really been witnessing to what God is doing through Jesus.

The love that Jesus showed to the world was and is tough as well as tender, abrasive as well as warm, and never ending. Jesus whole life was filled with the Glory of God - not because he was such a good person, or the most powerful, glamorous, rich, talented, but because he glorified God through his whole life.

Jesus was the son of God. He was God made flesh – holy and human. That, in itself, was a glorious thing. Jesus was the embodiment of all that God wanted for humanity – a relationship with the holy – an acknowledgment of the Glory – a respect, compassion, and deep selfless love for all God’s children.

How does Jesus’ life of giving glory to God compare with the glory of the world? What gets lifted up in our world today? And when everything seems to be going just right – is that when we normally think God is most present? Is it just the high moments? Like at graduation, a wedding or the birth of children? Certainly, these times are worth celebrating, but in these times do we notice the Glory of God? Do we notice the bush burning over there? Do we see or hear God’s message to us?

What about most of our moments of life together – as a family or a church family - when either things just plod along, or when we fail, argue, hold deep grudges, clash, butt heads, suffer through a pandemic together...Do we notice the glory of God when we have to clean up after someone’s mess? Do we notice

the Glory of God when we're really peeved at the way someone has treated us? Is this when we hear the call and sing, like Mary, "From now on, everyone will call me blessed?"

"Glory" has to do with relationships. For Jesus, his glory was in living out God's purpose. What did Jesus do when faced with God's Glory? Jesus Christ gave everything – including his life for the sake of the world whom God loves.

Is this our response when we're faced with the glory of God?

At his last supper with his friends, Jesus prayed: "Father, protect them ... so that **they** may be one, as we are one" (17:11b). Later in this chapter-long prayer, he repeated, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me ... so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (17:22-23).

To "*be one*" doesn't mean the absence of conflict. It means together seeking out God's presence, it means turning to face the Glory of God even - or especially - in those times when God feels distant or apart. That's when we most need to see God, isn't it?

Friends, do you see the glory of God when you're let down by your neighbour? Do you see the glory of God when you notice that people around you just don't practice what they preach? Do you see the glory of God when you're just so angry at another person that you can't even think? Truthfully, those are the moments we feel furthest from God, right? Yet we know that "*nothing can separate us from the love of God.*" (Romans 8:38-39). God is there, even when we are tempted to think God's just asleep in the bow of our sinking boat.

Don't wait for the moments when everything is perfect, for when you're feeling good or in the proper frame of mind. Look around you now – today – or whenever you think of it. Pray to God to open your mind and your heart to witness that every bush around you is burning with the glory of God.