

“Evidence of a God Sighting”

Exodus 34: 29-35

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February 7, 2016

There has been a humorous post going around on Facebook that ties the Superbowl to Church. It reads: “You should be as excited about church as about the Superbowl. So when your pastor makes a point this Sunday, pour gatorade over their head.” Since I wrote my first draft of this sermon, a few people have posted it on my wall. I don't know if I should be worried that people might be thinking about dousing me with gatorade, or more worried if no one does it if that means my sermon is pointless.

The horror of red gatorade soaking the sanctuary aside, I love this post because I grew up in a football family. We were a house divided between the Rams and the Seahawks. But it didn't matter what team was playing, or if neither of our teams were playing, if there was a football game on tv, it was playing on our tv. I didn't start going to church until high school which means I have many more Sunday memories of football games than I do of worship or Sunday School. I fully appreciate a tradition that involves jerseys and hats and t-shirts, special food like wings and chips and dips, cheers and fight songs and rituals, inviting all of ones friends to join in the revelry with you each week, and sharing all the details with the sad individuals who missed out. Even though I have fallen out of the habit of being a real football fan, the post on Facebook reminded me of all that I used to love about it.

It also made me wonder: what if we really WERE as excited about church as we were about the Superbowl or football in general? What would it look like if we wore our faith as readily as we wear the jersey of our favorite team? What would it look like if we called each

other after worship each week to go over the highlights of the service and make predictions about what will happen next week? I'm not saying it's a perfect metaphor but I am saying that if that were to happen, I'd be pouring gatorade on myself each Sunday.

The story we heard from Exodus we is one story about what it might be like if showed our faith like we showed our love for football. Moses goes up on Mount Sinai and encounters God. The experience leaves him so transformed that there is no hiding it. When he comes down and people see him, before he can even speak, they see that his face is shining, evidence of his God sighting, a change so obvious that it frightens people, wondering if he is the same guy who they knew before he went up the mountain.

Imagine someone going down to Florida or the tropics for a mid-winter vacation and returning with a tan so deep that it shocks the rest of us pasty, pale Northerners. That's a bit what I imagine it was like the day that Moses came off the mountain. He doesn't mean to frighten anyone with his shining face, so he puts on a veil. He hides that part of himself, making him more approachable and allowing people to hear the words he brings from God.

I like that in the story, Moses continues to use the veil – always lifting it when he is with God, but when he is with his fellow leaders, sometimes lifting it so they can see his true face, and sometimes wearing it so that he blends in better with them. That is so relatable to me – who hasn't changed how they are acting or what they look like to better blend in with people or to make themselves more accessible? To return to our earlier metaphor, it's like a Giants fan leaving their favorite hat at home when they go with a friend to a Patriots game.

The veil for Moses helps him blend in when he needs to, but it also prevents the people around him for seeing his true self. Moses wore his love for God all over his face. Moses was transformed by the discussions he had with God, but he wasn't always able to show the gravity of what that meant. Over time, the more people grew to understand how he was changed, and what

effect his relationship with God had on him, Moses was able to lift up his veil more often, revealing his ever shining face. Over time, Moses was able to fully show his true self.

This makes me wonder: how might our lives change if we lift the veil that stands between us and God? What does it look like when we bring our full selves to our encounters with God, and how does that transform us when we are with other people? In our culture, especially in our region of the country, faith is seen as a private matter. It is not something we talk about at the water cooler at work or even with the neighbors around us. In many ways, we wear veils that keep our spiritual life separate from the rest of our lives. Even I – a minister – don't always go around wearing my faith on my sleeve or on my face. When people meet me, they can't tell how often I pray or when I've last encountered God – most people ask me what I do for a living and are surprised when I say I'm a minister. Some of that is because of their own assumptions about what a minister is or looks like, but some of that is because just like everyone else, I am prone to wearing a veil to blend in.

But Moses reminds me that we are our most true selves, our most connected to God, when we are able to lift our veils and let our full selves be seen, including the parts of us that includes a faith or a spirituality or even a tenuous connection to God or the Divine. How might our lives change if we lift the veil that stands between us and God?

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, that season that marks the forty days leading up to Easter. Lent is the season in the church when we are supposed to be intentional about recognizing God in our lives. Sometimes we do this by giving up something – noticing God in the absence of something we enjoy like meat or chocolate or cable tv. Sometimes we do it by taking something on – a prayer practice or a good deed each day or reading a chapter of the Bible each morning. But whatever we do to mark this season, it is about answering the question: when we lift the veil that stands between us and God, how do our lives change? The

invitation this Lenten season is to lift our veils – to make ourselves ready to fully encounter God, and to be daring enough to let others see the effect that might have one us, whether it is a shining face or a joyful spirit or an ease with forgiveness and mercy.

If you are looking for inspiration this Lent, to see how others have encountered God and how it has changed their lives – how they have lifted their own veils – I invite you to check out the South Church devotional book. Like some of you, I peeked ahead to read some of the stories. They were so good that I have no doubt I will be reading one, or rereading one, every day from Ash Wednesday until Easter. They are testimonies of love, forgiveness, courage, hope, and the willingness to be open to God's presence and Spirit that moves through our lives. It is a reminder to me that even we are consumed with the Superbowl and similar events this season, there is still room for God AND I am not alone. I am not the only one thinking about how I might encounter God more fully this season. Our devotional is full of people who have encountered, and continue to encounter, God in diverse, wonderful ways. In exploring their stories, we might begin to explore our own faith in a deeper, more authentic way. We might begin to lift our veils and let our faces shine.