

Beholding to Become

Exodus 34:29-35
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]
Psalm 99

How many of you have ever popped open a shaken can of soda or a bottle of champagne? People scattering as liquid, sweetened, joy spouts everywhere? The scientific name for this bubbly experience is called effervescence. It is “the escape of gas from an aqueous solution and the foaming or fizzing that results from that release”. The carbon dioxide trapped in your coke, bubbles and pops when it reaches the surface, breaking free from the liquid that had constrained it.

It is my opinion that effervescence is the perfect description of what happened when God created the world. What was true among the unseen godhead, the joy and beauty and love God shared, burst forth through the primordial waters, and created the world. I wasn't there. This is just my speculation. But, when the Bible talks about the world being created to reveal God's glory, this is the image that comes to mind. All the unseen magnificence that is God, unable to be constrained, burst forth, effervescing the created world.

God's glory revealed a perfect creation and a perfect relationship with humans. The entire creation experienced perfect joy in the presence of God. And God wanted human participation in effervescing into the world all of that pre-existent joy, beauty, and love. But when that perfection of creation's intent was broken, when the created man tried to function apart from the created design, serving himself rather than the created order, sin entered. The very first break in relationship between the creation and the creator initiated the very first veiling. Humans cut themselves off from their source of effervescence and lost their ability to fully experience God's presence and power. That shame and brokenness means we now only experience God veiled. Veiled through the shame of clothing our nakedness. And veiled on the other side of the heavenly barrier.

Our Scriptures give us glimpses beyond the limitations of these veils and a hope for the kingdom we are invited into recreating. However, it has become common for people to think of God's kingdom as something existing either very far away or very distant in the future. But Jesus told believers that the kingdom of God exists within us, and he admonished his followers to bring the kingdom of God into tangible reality through our lives in this world. The kingdom of God is this world ordered according to the intent of God's original creation. It is the restoration of fellowship between God and humans. It is humans living lives of service, effervescing from God into the created world.

In Luke's little congregation on the mountaintop, and when Moses climbed Sinai or entered the tabernacle, we hear God speaking out of a cloud that had settled on them. God's voice wasn't coming from far away. The cloud fell on them. It overshadowed them. They were within the cloud that held God's voice. God was not distant. The animating, effervescing, and sustaining reality of God and God's kingdom was closer than they could possibly imagine, and it is closer to us as well.

Which begs the question of where we go to find God? We can't argue with the fact that a veil exists between what we can perceive of God and what we cannot. Our senses give us access to experiencing God in our physical bodies. Some of us have spiritual senses which allow us to perceive God in other ways. But God has given us all the ability to access the other side of the heavenly veil through prayer. God is no more distant to us now, than at creation or during these miraculous encounters. God is right here, just veiled from sight.

Both of today's narratives tell stories of humans experiencing miraculous encounters with God while engaged in prayer. Moses' time in prayer made his face shine so brightly that the entire congregation of Israel begged him to cover himself. Even Jesus, the very son of God himself, had the appearance of his face transformed when he was in prayer. The original language of these texts describe this transformation with words like glory, dazzling white,

brightness, even lightening. The transformation they experienced in prayer was so dramatic that it freaked everyone out! It was powerful and otherworldly. We veil ourselves to feel protected, to not let anyone see our shame. In prayer, these men experienced the stripping away of their coverings and the intimacy that resulted transformed the way they appeared to others.

In the cosmic plan of God to restore the created order and rebuild relationships with humankind, God put God's own Spirit inside of us. We are the effervescence of God. When we look in a mirror, according to saint Paul, we are seeing the glory of the Lord. IN the mirror. Staring back at us. Our own faces reflecting the glory of God. Or at least, we are seeing our image transform from one degree of glory to another. We make the invisible things become visible. We effervesce. The godness in the Spirit living in us bubbles up and out of our faces.

The thing that made Moses' face continue to glow was the time he spent in the presence of God. When he stepped into God's presence, he took the veil off. He allowed himself to be fully seen and in being seen so fully, he felt God's love completely. That kind of love will always make us glow. When we behold that kind of love, we become that kind of love.

After Jesus' experience of this on the mountain, he came down and was immediately bombarded with the needs of suffering people. A father tells him that he asked the disciples for help, but they were not able. Jesus' response is harsh. Jesus was a human man who had just come off a supernatural encounter so it's reasonable to understand his testiness. But his response was directed at the disciples, not the father in need. Jesus' complaint gets warped in translation. But in the original language he scolds them for two things. The first is their lack of faith. The second is his frustration with what humans had become. He uses a word that means confused and distorted. Jesus knows what we were created to be, he just experienced it. So, to come off the mountain and be assaulted with

the reality of all that has been lost and the consequences of that loss in the face of a desperate father and the body of a tormented child was brutal.

Lately, it seems, many of Jesus' followers are feeling this same way. We see the distortions of God's intent in the world around us. We see the brokenness, those who are hurting, suffering, and afraid. And we can even relate with the father in this story, desperate for someone to help or heal the vulnerable. The simple response is to get mad and point the finger at those we feel are responsible for the harm. But finger pointing, name calling, and anger are not the solution to the confusion and distortions in this world. Rather, according to Jesus, faith is the key. We must believe in our identity in Christ and trust God's image, effervescing through our lives, IS the way God will bring restoration to this world.

Wringing our hands while remaining fixated on the brokenness of the world is a rejection of the truth of the gospel. God's power working through us, not someone else, but us, is what WILL transform this world. It is our time in God's presence that makes it possible for our lives to make a legitimate difference in this world and in the lives of others. Paul tells us it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in ministry, and because God's mercy is limitless, we should not lose heart.

When we don't feel like the image we see in the mirror looks enough like the Christ we seek to emulate, we can be confident in the transformative power of God's love. When the world's brokenness feels beyond repair and we want to rage and point fingers, we can trust the mercy that sustains us is the same mercy that can fix the things that seem irreparable. When we don't feel like the world around us can be healed by God's work through us, we can be certain that the resources available to us through prayer, are sufficient to accomplish the work God is calling us to do. We were created from effervescence to effervesce. As we behold God, we will become like God. And our likeness to God will make God's kingdom visible, here, even now.

May we be a people, unashamed to behold God with unveiled faces. May we recognize so clearly the twistedness in this world that we run regularly into the presence of our one true source of rescue. And may our time spent in prayer, beholding God's glory, shine out from us, transforming both us and the world around us.