

## Trading Faces

Exodus 34:29-35 II Corinthians 3:1-3, 12-18 Luke 9:28-36

February 14, 2010 Transfiguration Sunday

*This sermon was preach by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, grace and peace be with you all.

We all love to see pictures of people! But how much do we like having our picture taken? Thanks to the prevalence of digital cameras when we do have to submit to having our picture taken, we can see the results right away and quickly the delete any shot we don't like. Still, the old adage remains: "the camera doesn't lie."

Recently I was reading about people's real and manufactured bashfulness about having their picture taken. The article mentioned a couple of old aphorism: "If you look like your passport photo, you need the trip." "If you look like the photo on your driver's license, you shouldn't be driving."

More seriously, I want to propose that the experiences we go through will shape our appearance. It been my experience that as people go through a significant ordeal, grief, time of testing or stress, you can tell just by looking at them.

After many years of serving this congregation, I've watched lots of people endure significant challenges. I often see it on your faces. With few exceptions, I've been impressed with the tenacity of the human spirit you display, as well as strong faith in a gracious God when times are tough for you! But no matter one's strength of faith, the faces show the experiences. Some time after the ordeal has passed or the stress diminished, when healing has come, I am amazed at the change in face I see. Sometimes I'll comment "You look like a different person." And the response: "I am. It's a wonderful thing that's happened to me."

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All three Bible readings today illustrate this in a wonderful way. I'm going to run through each one. We start in the Old Testament with the story of Moses. He's just been up on Mt. Sinai and seen God face to face. God has given Moses the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. As he arrives at the bottom of the mountain, people notice his face. They don't pay attention to the stone tablets he's carrying. They stare at his face because they can see something has happened to Moses while on the mountain. They can see it in his face. He is a different person now.

The Bible puts it this way: "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God." The people saw Moses and they knew he had been with God. They could see it on his face.

The experiences we go through will shape our appearance.

In the second Bible reading today from II Corinthians, the writer Paul refers to this experience of Moses and how people noticed his face. Then to Christians of his era Paul says: "People looking at you ought to be able to see that you have been with Jesus. They should see some quality in your life (on your face) that makes you attractive and makes them want to find out, what is it about you? What has happened to you?" And I think those words should apply even today.

Finally, the third Bible reading: To understand it, you need to know that Jesus has just told his disciples that he would undergo suffering and be killed. But after three days he would be raised. Then Jesus told his disciples they too would face persecution for being his followers.

Shortly after saying this Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray. While he is praying, a bright light suddenly shines. The appearance of Jesus' face changes! Like Moses so long before, that can mean only one thing. Jesus was seeing the face of God.

Peter, James and John see this taking place! They also hear God's voice saying: "This is my Son. Listen to him!"

While dramatic as this scene is, it's ends rather oddly. Jesus, and the three disciples go down the mountain. No doubt their faces are aglow. They look like they've been out skiing on a sunny day and gotten a sunburn. Then Jesus says, "Don't tell anybody about this."

While the Bible doesn't tell us about their faces or whether anyone noticed a change in these guys — I want to guess that their faces showed they had been in the presence of God.

We spend a lot of time and energy in our lives putting on our face. We do our best to display expressions that belie what's going on inside us. How often do we show our faith on our faces? Have you ever wondered where we learn to put on our faces?

Last week, Akio Toyoda, the president of Toyota in Japan went on television to apologize publicly for sticking gas pedals and mushy brakes. But he wasn't just another CEO trying to stop the bad PR and plummeting sales of his company's product. As the grandson of Toyota's founder, he was desperately trying to "save face" for himself and his family.

In Japan and in many Asian cultures "face" is everything. "Face" is arguably the most positive social value a person can claim. One's "face" is the combination of honor, reputation, responsibility, and you must maintain your face in all social interactions. In Asian cultures if you "lose face" you disgrace and diminish your social, emotional, intellectual, even spiritual standing with others. The concept of "face" is so critical to Japanese culture, that there are 98 different words to describe it. All social interactions depend on carefully maintaining these concepts of "face."

Face is important to us, too. We maintain our faces to be liked and accepted by others. We hold our faces to mask what's really happening inside our souls or in our lives. I know that sometimes I come into worship with my best face in place — even when inside I'm carrying burdens or questions that weigh heavily. Has that even been true for you, too? Being inside a church building can be one of those prevalent places where we put on our faces — and hide what's really inside our hearts and minds.

In this country and beyond 400 million people put their faces out to the world on "Facebook." Facebook allows us to create the image of ourselves that we want others to see. We can edit out aspects of our lives that might be embarrassing, uncomplimentary. We can post only the most flattering pictures of ourselves. We can show others a face to our lives which really isn't accurate or honest. Facebook gives us full responsibility to manage our face even while no one actually sees our face.

Imagine if Peter, James and John, had come down the mountain after that incredible experience with God and gone to update their Facebook page to tell about this God-encounter! No one would have seen their faces! And what would have been lost?

This bible story continues on with Jesus moving away from the mountain and coming face to face with an evil spirit who is mauling a young boy. He faced the evil and cured the boy. Then Jesus faced Jerusalem and headed for the face-off with the people who would kill him.

As we continue reading the story of Jesus during the next six weeks called Lent, we'll see how Jesus keeps his face and remains true to God in complete trust. We'll see how Jesus faces the worst of human actions and people's attempts to save face. We'll follow as Jesus faces the cross and takes our sins from us. We'll watch as Jesus faces the real pains and suffering that we know in life — and how in the midst of great challenge how through his face he shows the light of God's power and grace.

While you and I spend a lot of time and energy putting on our face or saving face with each other and even God; God sees behind our face and inside to our souls. There — God, through Jesus applies hope, promise and good news: that God's faces is always toward us and for us. Amen.