

## Inside Out

Exodus 24:9-18 Psalm 93:1-2 Matthew 17:1-8

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Have you ever wondered what God looks like? That kind of questioning didn't just begin recently. It harks back to recorded time. Humans have always had a problem worshiping an invisible God, so through the generations people have created gods that can be seen and touched. They have created gods made of wood and stone and precious metal.

It is quite possible that Jesus knew that at least a core group of his disciples would need some spectacular revelation about his authenticity, about the fact that He is God, the Son, before He would go through the events leading to his death and resurrection.

There had been other men who had claimed to be the promised Messiah. All had died, some quite violently at the hands of the Romans. This Jesus, this Messiah, was the real person. Jesus was sent to earth to introduce us to God.

Jesus would need these disciples to fulfill his mission throughout the earth after his return to heaven. Nothing would impress like a personal, visual, verbal encounter with the glorified Jesus. Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John and brought them up to a high mountain where they would have an experience that would forever change their lives.

This mountaintop experience with Jesus and the three disciples is reminiscent of the experience of Moses and his meeting with God on Mount Sinai. Moses had taken Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel to the top of Mount Sinai. There they met with God. Moses would later describe God as appearing to be standing on a pavement of sapphire that was as clear as glass. They were able to look up through the pavement and see the feet of God. They were looking at as much of God as any human being could see and live. The true glory of God could not be endured by any human and survive.

Moses recorded that they ate and drank with God. It was a covenant meal to signify the giving of the Law of God. It was a precursor to our Communion Meal that signifies the New Covenant.

Moses then remained alone with God for 40 days and nights fasting with God and receiving the Ten Commandments. The number 40 is used to describe "a long time." God inscribed the Commandments on tablets of stone with God's own finger. The Commandments were personal.

But people being who people are, the Hebrews were at the base of the mountain, pooling their gold, and building a god that they can see, a golden calf like the one they had seen worshiped in Egypt. Moses was so angry when he came down the mountain and saw what they had done that, in his anger, he threw down the tablets and they were broken. In effect the greatest Word of God to the people had already been broken by the people at the foot of the mountain. God's Word to them had been "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol..." These freed slaves have so much to learn about the One True God. The patience of God is unimaginable! Again, God invited Moses to come up to the top of the mountain and once again God inscribed the tablets with the Commandments.

Travel now to some 1300 years later.

Jesus knows that the time is short when He will no longer be physically with his disciples on earth. There is no time to waste in making sure that the disciples are equipped spiritually to carry the Good News into the entire known world.

Jesus travels with the disciples to Caesarea Philippi to a location where some non-Jews living in Israel gather to worship the idol, Pan. It is there that He tells his disciples that He will suffer, be killed, and raised to life. We cannot imagine how shocking this must have sounded to these disciples. They have left everything to follow Someone who is going to die! Jesus knows that the disciples will face others who do not know Him. They must know for sure within themselves who He is. And so Jesus asks the questions of them, "Who are people saying that I am?" After their answers, Jesus then asks that all important question that comes to all of us, but to those disciples He asks, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

It appears that Peter, James, and John were those among the disciples who provided an inner circle of leadership with Jesus. Six days after sharing with the disciples the shocking news of what was in his future, six days for them to talk about this news, six days to think about what they were going to do, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the top of a mountain to pray. Traditionally, the Christians in Israel will point you to Mount Hermon, part of a mountain range in that area as the place where they went.

While they are there, no doubt talking and praying, the most amazing event so far in the lives of those disciples occurred. There, standing with Jesus on the mountain, were Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. Moses and Elijah had come from heaven to talk with Jesus. In coming to earth, Jesus would fulfill all of the Law with grace, and He will bring to pass all that the prophets foretold.

The voice of God spoke from heaven once again saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."

When Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave directions for the building of a tabernacle, a place to meet with God. The scriptures tell us that Jesus came and "tabernacle" among us; in other words He becomes the place where we worship.

When Jesus is present, it is the presence of God. When Jesus heals, it is the healing of God. When Jesus speaks to us, it is the word of God.

"This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."

And then, in their presence, right before their very eyes, Jesus is transfigured! *Transfigured* is a very interesting word that literally means that there is a change so that the physical person who is seen outside is made to match the spiritual person inside. They could not look upon Him. The disciples are seeing Jesus "inside out." The appearance of Jesus changes. His face begins to shine as bright as the sun. His garments became white as light.

White is the color representing purity. White was the color of the garments that the High Priest wore when the Priest made sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Because of his death and resurrection Jesus has become our High Priest, our advocate, our grace, and our forgiveness from sin

There on the mountain the glory of God the Son broke through, the kind of glory of which Moses only caught a glimpse of God on Mount Sinai. It is a unique revelation to these disciples so that they might catch just a glimpse of the glory that Jesus had before He came to earth in human form. It makes known the fact that God has broken into our world through Jesus. The transfiguration also gives us confirmation of our faith. It is the confirmation of our trust, or hope, in Jesus and the grace of God.

Just as the Hebrews needed someone to liberate them from slavery in Egypt; just as the people of Israel hoped for a day when God would send the promised Messiah to free them from the rule of Rome; even so, the Africans who were enslaved hoped for someone who would also set them free.

In due time President Lincoln did sign the Emancipation Proclamation, but a law does not set all things right. Progress in earning civil rights continues to this day. There is yet a long way to go in our relationships and respect for one another as people.

Today's person whose memory we honor, a person who struggled through that process, is Robert Keith McFerrin, Sr. Personal disclosure: I knew Robert McFerrin. When he returned to St. Louis to live, he became a member of the church where I was serving.

Robert McFerrin was born in Marianna, Arkansas, on March 18, 1921. He was one of three brothers and the son of a pastor. He began singing in the church choir at an early age. When he completed eighth grade he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in St. Louis so that he could attend Sumner High School, the first segregated high school for African Americans west of the Mississippi. It was there that he began to broaden his musical connections. After high school he enrolled in Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. As a sophomore he received a scholarship to attend the Chicago Musical College. Following service in World War II he returned and completed his degree.

He then moved to New York City and began receiving voice coaching from Hall Johnson, composer and choir director. It was Hall Johnson who composed the Spiritual that was sung this morning. He married Sara Copper, also a singer. They had two children, Bobby and Brenda, both active in the music world.

McFerrin's professional singing career began with singing parts in Broadway musicals. He sang the title role in *Rigoletto* at the Tanglewood Musical Festival and then began singing with the New England Opera Company. He distinguished himself by winning the Metropolitan Opera's Auditions of the Air, the first African American to do so. He would later become the first African American man to sing at the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Opera. His voice was described as "a baritone of beautiful quality, even in all registers, and with a top that partakes of something of a tenor's ringing brilliance."

In 1958 he went to Hollywood to work on the *Porgy and Bess* movie. Sidney Poitier was cast as Porgy and he had a singing role, but Poitier was tone deaf. Poitier would lip-sync the words to the music and McFerrin would sing the songs.

McFerrin's career continued with singing and teaching.

He returned to St. Louis in his semi-retirement, but continued to teach, and occasionally provide special music for the worship service. In 2003 he was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the

International Professional Opera Companies and Opera Volunteers International. He is commemorated by a brass star and bronze plaque embedded in the St. Louis Walk of Fame.

He died on November 24, 2006 and is buried in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

Something happens to the person who comes into the presence of God. The face of Moses was shining when he came down the mountain after spending time with God. Being in the presence of God, listening to God, left the disciples transformed. Growing up in the life of the Church provided a foundation for Christian living for Robert McFerrin that lasted a lifetime.

When one becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, one meets Him spiritually face to face. Think about how your life has been transformed, about who you are now, because you placed your trust in Jesus as God, the Son.

This morning, as happens every time that we enter into worship, Jesus joins with us, welcoming us into his presence, and inviting us into God's grace.  
Amen.