**Far Out (Exodus 34:29-35)**

*10:00am Holy Communion – 2nd March 2025*

**Exodus 34:29-35**

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

**Luke 9:28-36**

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

<Prayer>

**Does anyone remember a television series called the Twilight Zone?** It’s production goes right back into the 1960s, but there have been some more modern remakes too. It was a cult TV series and a bit strange, but that was the point. The Twilight Zone was so named because it dramatized your most vivid dreams, those which fall somewhere between being completely asleep or being completely awake. In such a twilight state, speculative thoughts can emerge that just seem so real that we may think we are being told something profound. Such dreams may be a playing out of our worst fears or your most romantic encounter. **Somehow the mind is released in a most creative way.** Psychologists have called this in-between time Hypnagogia.

In our Christian lives, our deep-seated faith means so much to us, soi that we may even find our faith forming part of our dreams. I wonder if God finds our involuntary thoughts to be a place where we can be more open to his presence, than if we were in our fully rational and usually very distracted state. The prophets knew this from their own experience, and I have known it too. One of them – the prophet Joel – spoke of just such a time: *“God says - I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”*

**Many artists, musicians and writers have found inspiration from dreams, so much so that they may seek to induce in themselves such dreamlike states of irrationality.** That is how we got such characters as Ziggy Stardust, Pink Floyd, The Doors, Jimmy Hendrix, Bob Marley and Sergeant Pepper! Psychedelic Rock they used to call it.

**I wonder how they could open up the pathways of their minds, to allow such creativity?** I think it was all about what you were smoking apparently, but I can’t make such a recommendation from the pulpit. **Far out – as they used to say!**

Our two Bible passages today have the kinds of scenes which can make one wonder – did that really happen? Somehow it all seemed so real, and indeed we might want it to be real – is there a message here? From the Old Testament it’s the description of Moses who has just been up Mount Sinai to meet with God and now has come down with divine commandments and messages. **He has just seen the face of God, so to speak, and now his own face is radiant – literally shining.** It had everyone rubbing their eyes and scratching their heads.

As Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, he did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, as the skin of his face was shining, they were afraid to come near him.

***What on earth has got into Moses?* they must have thought. He was transformed in some way.** Maybe it was too much for them – so Moses puts a veil over his face and only took it off when he was in God’s presence in the Tent of Meeting, or when speaking to all the people. Remarkable. The people kept their distance; they didn’t really want to go near – it was all quite frightening really. At that moment God seemed somehow present, but also separate, veiled for them in some way.

In the New Testament gospel of Luke, it seems to be there again. There is the mountain once more, and another great exchange, except this time there are more witnesses.

Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

This then is the *Transfiguration*, a moment of insight where heaven touches Earth. Jesus is seen in a most exemplary way with all divine radiance, shining by his countenance – the face of God turned towards us. **Yet, just like Moses, that happened in flesh and blood, in plain sight, not as a dream.** It could have been us; we could have been there.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

It sounds as if they were half asleep - in their shock, those with Jesus are left in a babbling state. I think they remembered that same story of when it happened to Moses too, with his shining face at the Tent of Meeting.

Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

*And then just like that,* they are nothing more than people on a mountain, the scene had ended. Did that really happen? Was I dreaming? **But they would never forget. Even alongside all the teachings and miracles, this was something even more precious to be left with.**

I can’t tell you how pleased I am that March has arrived, and we can call it spring – and a bit of sunshine too, as confirmation. Do you have that experience of the sun shining into your home and showing up all the dust? Spring has always been a revelation in our lives.

Just to remind you of the meaning of Epiphany and so much of what the Bible tells us at this time of the year – **that God shall be accessible to us in this life** – revealed and knowable in ways that we cannot put down to rational normality. We know Jesus was a person in mortal flesh, as we are. We are associated with him in all ways. **He can be revealed in us too.** That is part of the basis of our Christian hope, there is nothing of ourselves which shall be limited and cannot be transformed by God. **If that seems a bit far out, then it is supposed to be challenging, something supernatural, something to open up new pathways in our hearts and minds.**

**So, the questions now turn towards us. What are we going to do about it?** Lent begins from this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. Now the season is about opening up, to look at ourselves. But God knows how difficult it can be for us - to respond and change. We are a stiff-necked and conventional lot. **How can we open up the pathways of our minds, to allow something new to happen, with God?** Can we allow ourselves to be rocked and shocked, not by Jimmy Hendrix, although that is still quite good stuff!

We should not underestimate the effect that God may have on us, quite apart from the efforts we may make for ourselves. Giving things up in Lent is not a matter of pure discipline, although great effort may be required. Lent is the removal of distraction, and a reminder of our correct priorities. **Lent is openness and effort, not achievement and attainment.** **Do not validate your Christian lives on a scale of human determination and exact clarity, but rather on a scale of openness to God.** During this season of Lent, pray for God to reveal himself to you in new ways.

Amen