

Shining and Seeing

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on Exodus 34: 29-35 and Luke 9: 28-36

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How many of you lost power this past week? Wind came through North Canton last Sunday night that was like a hurricane; I don't remember the last time I've felt such wind, and it knocked down tree limbs and power lines. There was no power at the church on Monday, and so I didn't go into the office, and there was no power at school either. So, as you can imagine Dominic and Sophia were heartbroken that they had to stay home. Well, we didn't lose power in the Holmes household, and I hope you are among those who didn't lose it either. But, I should also probably tell you I've noticed that a lot of people are pretty funny when it comes to power outages, because they never prepared to lose power. So often they are unaware of where the flashlights are, or where the lighter is to light a candle, or even where the candles are. Now, when the power is on, they can easily find these things, but when the power is on, they forget how hard it will be to find these things in the dark. Well, fortunately, phones these days have built in flashlights, even though I admit I recently had to get my children to show me how to turn mine on.

Well, we all know how light enables us to see. I think all of us here know that when light hits an object that we're looking at, the light reflects off that object, and goes through the opening in our eye, the opening that is known as the pupil. Once it goes through the pupil, it then passes through the lens and goes to your optic nerve, which in turn tells your brain what it is that you're looking at. The opening in your eye doesn't have to be very big for you to see, but if you're in the dark it will open wider to let in more light. That's why if you've ever stepped out

of a movie theater into the sun, everything looks so bright. It takes your eyes a few minutes to adjust.

Well, again, I am sure you know all this. I'm not telling you anything that you didn't learn in grade school. We all know the basics of how vision works. But what you may not know is that they didn't know that this was how vision worked back in the ancient world two thousand years ago. And that brings me to a new word we're going to learn today. Are you ready? The word is EXTROMISSION. Say it with me EXTROMISSION. Extromission is how the ancients believed that you saw. Back, then, they didn't know that the way you saw was with light passing through your eye, which we call intromission. Back then, they thought you saw with light passing out of your eyes and illuminating all that was around you, and that's what we call extromission. Did you know that? Now you may say to yourself, how could anyone believe something so ridiculous? But it is not so ridiculous when you think about it, is it? Let's go back inside that dark movie theater for a moment and think about the projector. If that projector didn't shine light on the screen you couldn't see the movie, or think about a cat's eyes, how much they glow and reflect light even though they seem to give off light, or even think about human eyes. Think especially about a child's eyes. Think about how bright their eyes look. They almost glow, don't they? Now, when you get old like me those eyes dry out and look bloodshot, but when you are young they are moist and clear and they almost glow. Well, at what stage in life is our vision at it's best, when our eyes look bright, right? And at what stage in life is our vision the worst, when our eyes look dim? Aha! Now that view doesn't seem so foolish, does it?

So in the ancient world they believed that you could see because the light inside of you illumined everything around you. And we hear something of that ancient view in scripture

today. In our gospel story today, we hear about Jesus being on the mountain in the private company of Peter and two other disciples John and James, when Jesus' clothes turned white as the driven snow and his face began to change. But this transfiguration story that we tell every year is something that the Jewish listeners in the first century would have heard differently than we hear. This story for them would have brought to mind Moses who in our story from Exodus also goes up to a mountain, and as he comes down his face is also radiant and glowing because he has spoken with the Lord. But Moses' shining face does not just shine for himself alone, he illuminates the community around him because he brings with him the commandments of God.

So what do you think? Now, I'm not saying that this ancient extromissive view of vision was right, but does the light within us also illuminate the world around us? If you have ever known someone who does not know anything of the love of God, and whose heart is pure darkness, you know that what's wrong with them isn't just that they do things that are bad. It isn't just that they do things that are cruel, and heartless, or abusive. That is true, but it is also true that they see things in the world differently. When they look at people in the world they don't see beauty in their faces. They see someone who is standing in their way. They see someone who is competing with them in this world for a job, or for food, or medicine; they see someone who is making this overcrowded world even more overcrowded by taking up more space. When we don't have light in their hearts, we don't see light in other people, or in anything that God has made. When we have darkness in their hearts, darkness is all they see.

But if we can be changed from the inside, if we can have our hearts changed, then we will see the world differently, we will see our neighbors differently and you know what else, we will

even start to glow. I remember when I was in college, I had a friend named Keith and Keith was someone whose heart was so devoted to loving God and loving his neighbor, and his heart was filled with so much joy, patience and gentleness that whenever Keith walked into a room, he would literally light up the room. I'm not kidding, the room would light up. And I can even remember that everyone would sort of shift in their seats and turn toward Keith as if they were plants turning to take in the light of the sun. Now, I don't mean that he literally glowed, if I did you might think that Keith was hanging around too much radioactive waste, but it was close enough to literal that if I say I mean that figuratively, you won't get what I mean. Now, maybe that sounds hard to believe because maybe you've never seen anyone like that. But if you find it hard to believe, I want to tell you that I don't think too many people are like that. I think you should consider yourself blessed if you would even know one person like that in your entire lifetime. And maybe on the other hand, you have known someone whose heart is so dark and who is so filled with spite and malice and cruelty and anger that when they walk into a room it is as if all the light suddenly goes out of the room. I hope you've never known anyone like that, but I am afraid that these people exist too.

Following the Lord with your life is not just about what you do, it is about how you see. And you know, just like literature can change the way you see things, or poetry can change the way you see things, and just like art can change the way you see things, having your heart filled with the love of God can also change the way you see things, and it is no coincidence that all these other things change the way you see things too, because things like poetry and art and literature are all a celebrations of the created world that God has made. So the question for all of us is this one. Is the light of God within us, is the light of God within us that projects out onto

the world. And if it is, how bright is it? Does it make our eyes shine like a child's eyes, or is it dim and flickering and about to go out?

If I were to ask you to name a dangerous place, a dangerous place where you would never dare to go, you might pick some alley in downtown Canton or even Cleveland, or you might pick some maximum security prison that is filled with violent felons, or you might pick some war zone where bombs are dropping and shells are exploding day after day. But I doubt any of you would say this is a dangerous place, that church is a dangerous place. Oh, but this is the most dangerous place of all. I can remember when I was a Young Life leader, the other Young Life leaders and I wanted invite my friend Rajiv who was Indian to church with me. Now Rajiv was Hindu, and his mother who was also Hindu wouldn't let him go. She would say that church will change my son. We would say Rajiv tell your mother that's ridiculous we aren't going to change you we're just going to sing some songs and read some stories and hang around some other Christians. Oh, but she was right. Rajiv's mother was right. You can come in here week after week thinking you're just going to sing some nice songs and hear some nice stories and hang around some nice people, but before you know it, your heart starts to change and you will see things differently. You hear about acts of injustice that you never really cared about before, but all of the sudden you will find yourself feeling outraged, or you will hear about someone's suffering and you suddenly say that's wrong. Or you will hear about someone else's kindness and your heart will dance, whereas before it went in one ear and out the other. Be careful, be careful because this music and these sermons and these prayers, they'll do things to you, they'll change you.