

God Touches Sinners Through Christ

The beauty of God became horror in the fall of man. The once intimate relationship held between Creator and creature became that of destroying fire and flimsy kindling. The story of the Old Testament is the narrative of God who cannot be seen, cannot be touched, cannot be heard making Himself available to His people through means. We heard this recently from Deuteronomy,

Moses speaks, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly saying, 'let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'"¹

As God led His people out of captivity in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night He was present but not too present. After the fall the Father never speaks to His people but rather speaks through Jesus. And, beyond even this, God continually uses mediators, like Moses, to speak to His people – mediators who first hear from Christ and then speak to God's children.

Yes, the mediators of God deliver God's Word and speak according to what they have heard. Moses, who alone approached the Lord, was made to shine simply by being in the concealed presence of the Father's Glory. This shining was to signify to the people that their mediator was truly bearing to them the Word of God. The authors of the New Testament are the same, as we hear from Peter today.

¹ Deuteronomy 18:15-16

We have not followed sophisticated myths when we made known to you the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and His coming but were eye witnesses... No prophecy comes by the will of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.²

Even at the time of Jesus' ministry in the flesh, the Father was still concealed. At Jesus' baptism a voice comes from the heavens declaring what you have heard here today, "*this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.*"³ And, yet here in the Gospel reading for Transfiguration, the Father is present in the cloud only. There is still distance, there is still hiddenness fixed between man and God.

As far a fallen man is concerned, this is a fine arrangement. God is terrifying, God's Words are convicting and powerful – even condemning us in our sin and confirming the hardness of our hearts. Just like the Israelites there are Christians who are tempted to say, "don't speak to me Lord, for I cannot bear it; don't make me look at you." This takes plenty of forms.

It could be as simple as letting your Bible, catechism, or prayer books gather dust. The longer you go, starving your Spirit of God's Word and prayer, the more hazy your image of God becomes. And, as the image fades into antiquity an imagined god replaces what you once found in the Scriptures. This god of the imagination is far more pleasing than what is offered to you in the Scriptures. And, why not, it says what you want it to say, it thinks the way you want it to think, and it behaves in the kind of predictable ways you would like it to.

² 1 Peter 1:16, 21

³ Matthew 3:17

This god is a whore. And, like whores, the first few embraces are sweet and pleasant. But, as Solomon preaches,

My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding, that you may preserve discretion and your lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a harlot drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell.⁴

As we have learned from the Gospel, you are what you worship. A false god of your own creation is a dangerous thing and destructive to your soul.

There are more insidious paths that such a god may find you through. And, it is akin to the Israelites asking Aaron to construct for them a golden calf when Moses was delayed in coming down the mountain. The temptation, the folly, is this: *relying on mediators.*

Paul warns the young pastor Timothy,

the time will come when [the people] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.⁵

Christians have to guard their ears against messages that are pleasurable and agreeable. Whether the messages are theological or not. Choosing a devotional habit that relies on the writings of others instead of the Word of God is foolish. Especially if that devotional is written by non-Lutherans or choosing a devotional that, while it is written by Lutherans, is nevertheless a poor devotional, is a form of relying of

4 Proverbs 5:1-6

5 2 Timothy 4:3-4

mediators instead of relying on God's Word.

As children of God you are guarded against this by the Word of God and the pure teaching of the Gospel. But, if you allow yourself to become ignorant of God's Word and replace His Word with the words of a mediator you make your heart stony ground. As Jesus speaks,

And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

These birds Jesus tells us are the demons who snatch away the promises of God. And,

And, Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.⁶

People are respecters of persons; people are afraid to offend you; people want you to buy their books. Their motives are not always pure when they are tasked with writing devotional material. Their teachings are too often truncated by what is popular, what is easy, and what is approachable.

False prophets operate from the old and tired adage, "at least someone is hearing the good news!" Providing someone with a shallow, false, or watered down preaching of the Gospel does not do their soul good. When Moses, instead of simply preaching and obeying God's Word, took matters into his own hands, he was barred from the promise land and died before entering it. The same punishment awaits everyone who rejects God's Word and replaces it with their own.

⁶ Matthew 13:4; Matthew 7:15

This warning includes your pastor! You cannot simply take what your pastor says and run with it. You must always be comparing preaching with the Scriptures. A sermon drawn from the Scriptures and faithful to the teaching of Christ is sometimes hard to bear. When the preaching of a Church becomes *always* sweet, *always* pleasant, *always* easy – the pastor is not doing his job. Any straying, any variance from God’s Scriptures must be corrected *by* the Scriptures.

It is only in this being corrected, this being rebuked, that the soul finds any rest. Papering over what God has spoken to His people, clouding up the comfort that Christ has preached to the faithful Christian is the work of the devil and our hands and mouths should be found far from this work.

Isn’t it difficult, though? Isn’t it hard to be plain and honest about the things our God has spoken when they condemn and offend the world around us so severely. You would be insane to think otherwise. This same fear is the plight of the disciples, the inner circle, Peter, James, and John.

They’re used to Jesus, they’re used to seeing human beings like Moses and Elijah. They could even bear to see the cloud concealing God’s glory darken the sky. But, when they heard the voice from the cloud – when the Father spoke without a mediator – they were knocked to the ground in fear.

Fear brought on by the purity, beauty, and power of the voice of God. This

same voice created the heavens and the earth. This same presence walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden until the fateful day they ate the fruit, this same voice called to Adam and Eve when they hid themselves; condemned Cain for the murder of His brother, called Abraham to number the Stars; promised the birth of Isaac, the birth of a savior from the loins of Abraham; condemned the Israelites to be locked in chains of Egypt; renamed Jacob Israel after contending with him; spoke to Moses through the burning bush, inaugurating the Exodus; spoke to the children of Israel atop the mountains; Made Moses face shine like the Sun; Called to Samuel to be His prophet; condemned the sin of David and Bathsheba; spoke the destruction of the nation of Israel through the Prophet – yet always in these words and these directions repeated the promise of the Savior – His own Child.

And so, in seeing the cloud, in hearing this voice, the disciples are stripped bare of their pride. They are brought face to face with their own demise. With little to nothing between them, they stood before the fire of life that revealed their emptiness. Hearing life itself issue forth from the mouth of God revealed their own darkness. It revealed their selfishness, their hatreds, their lusts; The ugliness of their bodies, their diseases; the weakness of their limbs and the dumbness of their tongues – their hopelessness. The eyes of the men who were filled with pride and ready to set up temples for their messiah and his friends suddenly fall to the ground and tremble. But, what can they do? There is nowhere to run once you have tasted life and discovered

your own death. There is nowhere to hide when you have heard the purity of God and discovered your own deep and undoing wickedness. There is no solace for the life that has heard the ultimate life, the voice of God, sound out its maddening chorus “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!*”⁷ That is to say, “*THIS is my beloved son and no other.*” Listen to Him. Listen to Him who speaks with the same voice that has spoken history and caused reality. Listen to Him with your eyes buried in the sand of a high mountain. Listen to him with your hands over your ears, your body shaking, and your soul wishing for its own quick departure.

But, then, a touch. The same consuming voice of God clothed and made gentle in flesh that shines like the sun reaches into the cacophony of man’s own rattling death bound spiral putting to end the fear; confusion; departure and speak, “get up, don’t be afraid.”

You can see it, you can imagine it. The disciples looking up from the sand to where Moses, Elijah, the cloud of Glory, and a transfigured Jesus once stood as figures encompassing all of human history and God’s speech to that history – radiating the glorious workings of the Holy Trinity in visible light – yet seeing only Christ – in His humanity – smiling with kindness, with knowing, with love for them and their frail bodies. Saying to them what He says to you and I in our baptisms, “resurrect, do not be afraid. You are now children of God and this glory cannot hurt you.” Amen.

7 Matthew 17:5

Transfiguration 2026

Exodus 34:29-35; 1 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

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