



Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So, they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show

me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperors, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

In his book *Let Your Life Speak*, author and educator Parker Palmer faced a big decision. He had just visited a prestigious school to meet their administration and consider their offer to become the school's President. He had already asked a group of trusted friends to hold a discernment committee. A Quaker tradition to discern the direction one should go.

After three hours deflecting questions about the difficulty of the job, Parker admitted he was imagining his picture in the school catalogue as President. Finally, he was asked, “Parker isn’t there an easier way to get your picture in the paper?”

After the meeting he immediately called the school and withdrew his name from consideration. He discovered that feeding his ego should have never influenced his decision. It would have been harmful to him and the institution.

It is so easy to fall victim to our self-promoting ego. To want our image to be immortalized in some way. In the case of a person of enormous power, what better way to self-promote than to have your face stamped on a coin.

This kind of thing is typically done by others to commemorate a leader who has passed. But to do it for oneself while still in power?

For the truly powerful and honorable it simply diminishes their value. A piece of metal that is lost and trampled on.

That which is truly pure and holy simply cannot fit on a coin. In fact, the most valuable of all faces must forever remain a knowable mystery. Perhaps this is what God was telling Moses.

Moses wanted to see God’s face as proof of his presence. But Jesus said with the voice of Jack Nicholson, “You can’t handle my face!” The Glory of God will

penetrate the ego of the human condition and instantly kill the seeking, the desire, and the wonder. It would reduce the glorious mystery to just another pretty face.

Like with Moses and the migrants on the move, the presence of God is always with the migrants then and now.

The Glory of God cannot be defined nor made an idol. Yet this is what we do. We are all secret Parker Palmers facing the temptation to have our face on whatever we do. It is the vulnerability of the human condition.

Moses was insistent that God ease his fears and prove his presence would go with him. The best God was willing to do was moon Moses. Yup, God mooned Moses! Ironically, the face of Moses was never the same.

To create a definition for God or an image of God is to create an idol. To demand proof minimizes experience and elevates idol worship.

Idols die. Coins lose value. School catalogues fade and newspapers become kindling. The mystery of the word, the power which speaks into our bodies and souls cannot be contained as a graphic or a social media post.

What is most important to Moses and now to us? That we are sometimes paralyzed by the feeling God is not with us, or the truth that God is present even when we don't feel it?

How much time have we wasted needing validation?

This encounter with Moses and God comes on the heels of the children of Israel melting gold and creating an idol, an image to worship simply because they panicked.

How often do we accept the idols we create, or the world creates, to tell us we are not alone. How often do we accept a title that doesn't belong to us?

We're such suckers for names, likenesses and images that we spend millions to have someone else's name on our back. I've never seen somebody walk past me at a restaurant wearing a Jordan jersey and thought, hey that must be Michael Jordan!

Maybe it's just a way of saying to others where our allegiance is.

Aaah Now I get it! The emperors and egos of this world do not earn commemoration through death, they demand it in the form of loyalty and allegiance as they are living.

May we live in the grace and peace from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

God is not faceless; it shines upon us and within us as we move. Yet it can never be coined by any human.

A face whose glory is small enough to fit on a coin cannot compete with the face who has never been seen.

Amen