10-22-17

The Dazzling Light of God’s Presence

Exodus 33: 12-23 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 Matthew 22: 15-22

RR: Psalm 99

**Summary:** **All laud we would render; O help us to see
’Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee,
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart. (Immortal, Invisible), words by Walter C. Smith, based on I Timothy 1:17**

 A few weeks ago, when I read about God providing the quail and manna to His people, there was a moment when everyone was looking toward the wilderness. Moses was explaining what God planned to do. Suddenly, the dazzling light of God’s Presence appeared within a cloud. Many translations say, “The glory of the Lord appeared within a cloud.” The cloudy covering of His glory was provided by God as a protection. Looking at the sun during an eclipse can permanently blind, looking at God full on is too much to sustain life itself.

 That dazzling light is why God covered Moses and hid him in the cleft of the rock when His divine glory passed by. I can’t help but think: “Rock of Ages, cleft for me.” For Moses, it was a literal rock; for us, that Rock is Jesus, whose side was pierced for our sake.

That dazzling light, the glory of the Lord, shone for some shepherds tending their flock by night near Bethlehem when Jesus was born. A brief flash of the same glory on the Damascus Road blinded Saul when Jesus spoke to him. That may confuse us since, even after His Resurrection, Jesus could be touched and seen face to face. However, this incident is after His Ascension. Jesus has returned to His full glory, the perfect image of God. His is a dazzling light that needs to be shadowed by cloud, dream or extreme brevity to be endured.

 This Damascus Road encounter led to a healing encounter. Saul becomes Paul, a persecutor becomes an eyewitness, -- an apostle -- and through this man’s ministry, letters, and example, people came to understand God and the intentions of God’s Son more clearly. In turn, when Paul writes to the Thessalonians, he is pleased, not only by their message of faith, but also by their faithful example.

 You can probably guess where I am going with The Gospel, which tells again that familiar story of the trap laid for Jesus in the question about taxes. “Whose face is on the coin?” It was the emperor. No one saw God there.

 “So, give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and give to God what is God’s,” says Jesus. Taxes go to the government, but what about the ones who say, “We are God’s people?” Whose image can be seen when someone looks on us? No one can see God face to face and live; so God covers His dazzling light, His glory, but not in a cloud of water vapor. No, this time God covers Himself but in the cloud of witnesses to His glory: in us. It is as Jim has often said, “You may be the only Christ someone sees today.”

 For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright, and Christ’s great kingdom will come on earth, the kingdom of love and light! You are a star, like the one in Bethlehem so long ago; go forth and shine for the God who made you and sing of peace on Earth, good will to all!