

Exodus 24:12, 15-18  
*Life in the Cloud*

Are you in the cloud?

Just a decade ago that question would have meant something completely different from what it does today. Only a few short years ago being "in the cloud" could have meant that you were flying in an airplane through some mist in the sky. Or if someone thought you had your head in the clouds it meant you were a dreamer, out of touch with reality. Today it means something completely different.

I am in the cloud...which means I store my data someplace out on the Internet. I keep track of appointments using Google Calendar, and any changes I make on one device are quickly updated on every other device I use to access that calendar. I use Dropbox and Google Docs to store important documents "in the cloud." I don't know exactly where they are, but I know that whenever I want them I can just reach out into the cloud and access them.

I like being in the cloud. Everything is smooth and synchronized. If my laptop crashes or gets stolen, my data is still safe. Cloud computing is so popular because life in the cloud is good.

That is also true on Transfiguration Sunday...though we're talking about life in a different cloud.

Moses experienced life in that cloud. We're told that after being invited up Mt Sinai, **Moses went up onto the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The Glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai.** There he was, in the cloud forty days and forty nights while the Children of Israel camped around the mountain and watched and trembled.

What was life like for Moses in the cloud? Well, from the perspective of the Israelites watching from below, they must have thought life in the cloud was terrifying. We're told that the glory of the Lord that descended upon Mt. Sinai looked to them like a devouring fire. Who could enter God's presence and survive? That's a pretty typical reaction when human beings who are corrupt and sinful come face to face with God's glory. It's a terrifying experience to meet the true and living God, the Creator and Judge of all, the

one who can read our thoughts and discern our motives. He knows the things we've done behind closed doors and drawn shades. He knows the things we've whispered about other people on the phone. He knows the opportunities we've missed to do something good and meaningful, because we were too busy or too self-absorbed or too indifferent. He knows how we've loved the way the pagans love, not selflessly and sacrificially but selfishly to get something in return. The book of Hebrews terrifyingly reminds us, **Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

So what is a shame-filled human being to do when we come face to face with the true and living God? One popular strategy is for people to make their own god. If an encounter with the true God is too frightening, then make a god who is more to your liking. Make a god you can worship on your own terms. Imagine a god who can fit in your pocket, whom you can pull out to solve your problems and then put away again. Imagine a god who tolerates your sins and understands all your vices. Make a god in your own image, a god who doesn't care if you fornicate, gossip, steal, cheat, lie...a god who doesn't care if you're selfish, greedy, lustful, disobedient. Make a god who doesn't mind if you skip church, neglect Communion, and let your Bible gather dust. Make the kind of god you would like to worship on your own terms...because the true and living God is too frightening.

Of course, none of that would be real. That god, the soft-touch, sin-tolerant god is a figment of human imagination. But that's actually what the Israelites did. Moses went up into the cloud. And at first the Israelites were terrified, but when he took too long to come back down the mountain, they imagined he must have been destroyed, and they set about ignoring the glory of the Lord on the mountain. Instead they made their own god in the form of a calf of gold. Then they danced around it, bowed down to it, and did a bunch of filthy, depraved things that cannot be described in a g-rated, family-friendly sermon.

But up on the mountain, life in the cloud for Moses was not terrifying. It was awesome. Yes, God's glory appeared as a consuming fire, but God had invited Moses into the cloud. God embraced him and enveloped him, and Moses basked in the sublime presence of the Lord God. There in the cloud God revealed his will to Moses...his holy, perfect will...moral truth that has been since eternity and will be forever. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God upon tablets of stone. He gave him instructions for building the tabernacle...the movable tent where God's

Name would dwell on earth...where God would meet with his people. And God gave Moses instructions for building the Ark of the Covenant. All of those things—the tabernacle, the ark, the commandments—were patterned after heaven itself. They were earthly copies of the heavenly reality as the book of Hebrews reminds us. There in the cloud Moses learned the most wonderful truth about God...that God's ultimate glory is in his grace. That God restores relationships with sinners that have been broken by sin, and that through the shedding of blood there is forgiveness and cleansing.

Peter, James and John experienced life in the cloud too. It happened on the Mount of Transfiguration...where Jesus' appearance changed...his face became as brilliant as the sun and his clothes as bright as lightning. There on the mountain they heard their Savior speaking with Moses and Elijah about the blood that Jesus was going to shed in Jerusalem. As the cloud enveloped them they were terrified, but as they basked in the radiance of the glory of the Lord they found that life in the cloud was wonderful...so much so that Peter suggested building some shelters and making it last.

God announced, **This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.** And if God is pleased with his Son, and his Son is the substitute for sinners, then God is pleased with sinners for the sake of his Son. Remember, God's ultimate glory is in his grace, and through the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God God is reconciled with sinners, and the way into heaven is opened forever. That was a payment made in the darkness of the cloud that covered Calvary...where justice and mercy met at the cross...where Jesus was condemned so that you and I could live...where forgiveness and cleansing were completed...and where death was swallowed up by life and victory.

Moses, Peter, James, John—they all had to come out of the cloud where they basked in God's radiance. They had to come back down from their mountaintop experiences and bear a cross of discipleship in the world. But even as they carried their burdens for Christ, God's grace still surrounded and protected them.

That's the cloud of grace that surrounds you. When I talk about your life being in the cloud, I'm not referring to how you store your computer data. I'm talking about how your life as a Christian is now hidden with Christ in God. Life in the cloud is life that's lived each day in God's grace. It's not free from suffering and pain. Quite to the contrary, when you were washed in your baptism you were marked for tribulation in this world. When you were called to the Christian faith you were called to walk in the way that leads to heaven,

on the hard and narrow path that leads to life. But enveloped in the cloud of God's grace as we bear our crosses we can say, "Life in the cloud is good." Outside that sphere of Christ and his grace, the world can go crazy with its promiscuity, depraved people can attack Christians and call us bigots, they can try to silence the truth and pat each other on the back when they think they've succeeded. But outside of Christ there is only delusion and death and damnation. When you're in the cloud...when you're shielded by God's love and forgiveness in Christ... when you are completely confident that you have peace with the one True and Living God through the shed blood of Jesus...then while the world goes crazy you have the quiet serenity of knowing that it cannot touch you. And you can love others and pray for them...even your enemies...even when they hurl their invective and vitriol at you. You can pray that the Spirit of God would break their attachment to the false gods of their own delusions, change their hearts, and bring them also into the cloud of his grace.

You know, some people might revile and mock us and say, "You Christians have your heads in the clouds!" to which we reply, "Yes we do...because we have seen the majesty of Christ. We live in the grace of Christ. And we're watching and waiting for Jesus to come in the clouds of glory to take us to heaven. So make fun of us if you want, but what we'd really like is if you'd come on over and enjoy life in the cloud with us! Because it's a good life! Because it's life lived with Jesus. Amen.