

Sermon Title: **“Misunderstandings After Miracles”**

Bible: **Exodus 34:29-35 & Luke 9:28-43a**

When: on the Transfiguration Sunday, March 2, 2025

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. Do We Have Horns?**

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, in which we celebrate Jesus' radical change of appearance on the mountain, as we read the Gospel of Luke. Peter, James, and John were all present at the time. As we read in the book of Exodus, a change of appearance occurred in Moses' face as well. And the Israelites were there to witness it. Have you had any spiritual experiences like these in your life? Have you experienced any kind of miracle in your life?

If so, please be thankful for your miracle and your spiritual experience, because our Lord's holy presence was there. But sometimes, we can misunderstand the mystery of the miracle and spiritual experience. One of the fun misunderstandings is how to understand the description of Moses. Let me show you a very famous statue of Moses by Michelangelo. How do we know that this is Moses? If you look at his hands closely, there are two tablets which could represent the Ten Commandments. So it might be Moses. And if you look at his head, what can you see? Can you see horns? Moses has horns on his head, because of today's

Scripture Reading from Exodus. After Moses encountered God, Moses was not depicted as “shining,” but “horned,” unlike what we read in the Bible today. A long time ago, in the time of Michelangelo, their Bible translation was different from ours. Let me explain more.

Hebrew written words do not have vowels. In Hebrew, Moses was “QRN.” This “QRN” can be translated into both “QaRaN: shining” and “QeReN: horned.” It was translated that Moses was “horned,” not as “shining.” At that time, encountering the Divine one meant to have authority and the power from heaven. So, just being “shiny” might not be a strong enough image, but having horns might be more apt for the situation, because the people were afraid to come near Moses. Probably, because of this understanding, kings wear crowns on their heads, which sometimes have horns on them. To meet the kings, and to encounter God can be a fearful experience.

If you experienced any miracles or spiritual experiences with God, can you feel the horns on your head? Can you see the horns on my head? Fortunately or unfortunately, I do not have any horns on my head. Which translations do you prefer, Moses was shining or Moses was horned? And what Moses did in response was to put a veil on his face. And I love this humble attitude of Moses. The Old Testament described that God spoke through only the chosen people, like prophets, kings, and Moses in today’s scripture reading. But Moses knew that he was just a messenger to the people. His focus was not on himself, but upon God’s message and God’s people. He did not use his authority, his power, and his experience to blow his own horn. He cared for God’s people and God’s message first, rather than himself. I

believe that's why Moses was a great leader for the exodus!

## **2. No More Suffering and No More Challenge?**

Moses' horns were fun, right? And the common misunderstanding after a miracle or spiritual experience is that there will be no more suffering and no more challenge. Today's scripture reading of the Gospel of Luke has two stories. The first story is about the Transfiguration. On the next day, the second story is about Jesus' healing a boy with a demon. Actually, the second story is about the disciples' failure after the amazing experience of Jesus' transfiguration. Even after we have started our faith journey with God, there are still failures, suffering, pain, and challenges, even for us as Christians. Of course, through miracles, spiritual experiences, and encounters with God, we taste the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is already here and now, but it has not been completed yet. So we cannot avoid our own suffering and challenges while on the earth.

This was not an exception for Jesus, either. On the mountain, there was a voice, "This is my Son, My chosen," which was a similar voice to when Jesus was baptized. In the Jordan river, there was a voice saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved." And right after this amazing experience of baptism, Jesus was taken into the wilderness for forty days and nights, and was given three temptations. This was not before the baptism, but right after the baptism. After the great experience of God, Jesus experienced the temptations in the wilderness. What we can learn from this is that even though we experience suffering, even though we experience challenges, and even though we can fail, can we follow Jesus?

### 3. Exodus and Lent

During today's mysterious transfiguration story, what Moses, Elijah, and Jesus talked about was Jesus' exodus, what Jesus was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. Probably, it is about Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. And I love this translation as exodus. Many other translations have this word as his "departure." But the Greek word itself is "exodus." As we know the book of Exodus, it gives us more varied meanings. Even though God's people had suffered under the oppression, and even though they wanted to be free from that oppression, and even though God's people had a great leader in Moses, it took forty years to get from Egypt to the Promised Land. We might want to change ourselves and our broken world with the flick of a finger. But the change takes time and energy, and in the story of Exodus, it took forty years, more than one generation. We might hope that we would become disciples of Jesus Christ within a day, and that the transformation of the world would happen with God's love and justice in a day. But it requires the timing of Exodus. It might require time for misunderstandings, failures, suffering, and challenges. But please do not be discouraged. The great leader Moses got through this time of Exodus with God's people over the course of forty years, even though they misunderstood, and even though they wanted to go back to Egypt, in spite of it being a time of oppression. Our Lord, Jesus got through this time of exodus with his disciples, even though they had failed him many times.

From this coming Wednesday, the season of Lent will begin. The forty days of Lent will begin. It is the time to remember our Lord Jesus Christ, his life, his ministry, his passion and

death, and his resurrection. We do not count Sundays for forty days, because Sunday is always a little Easter. It will take time, misunderstandings, and failures to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But let us not be discouraged. That's because the kingdom of God is already here and now, in you and in our church. Even though it has not been completed yet, the kingdom of God will come, because our Lord Jesus Christ has died, and Christ is risen! Christ will come again. So, we can open our eyes today, and we can face today. So we can shine today, without having horns. During this season of Lent, let us remember Moses' forty-year Exodus and Jesus' forty-day temptation, and his exodus to the cross and from death! And let us make our own story of exodus!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, even though we misunderstand, even though we fail, we come to you. That's because you are our Lord, and because you are our love, our justice, our victory, and our resurrection. Through the struggles and challenges on the earth, please lead us and guide us. We want to be your disciples for the transformation of the world. During this coming Lent, please be with us and be closer to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.