



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
in the City of New York  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, February 27, 2022**  
*The Last Sunday After the Epiphany (Quinquagesima)*

*Festal Evensong*  
4pm

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Matthew Moretz, *Vicar*  
*on*  
Exodus 3:1-6; John 12:27-36a  
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### **The Voice of Glory**

In the Torah, we learn that if one were to look upon the face of God, they would die. God took care to warn Moses on Mount Sinai that he could only look upon his backside as he departed if he had any wish to live another day. But, if *seeing* God is deadly, *hearing* God is decidedly not. The voice of God speaks to Moses again and again, and he is just fine. One wonders what that voice sounds like. Masculine? Feminine? Like lightning? Like the cooing of a dove? Would it mimic your voice, perhaps, at least your language? Would that voice have an accent? The prophet Jeremiah heard God practically boast: “Is not my word like as fire?” saith the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” When the prophet Samuel heard God’s voice, it was so ordinary-sounding that Samuel thought it was his teacher, Eli. It took God four attempts to get the young prophet’s attention. The voice of God is featured in both of our readings tonight, the first speaking to Moses in Egypt, and the next speaking to Jesus and the gathered company of disciples and listeners. For the people near Jesus, some said that the voice was a thundering one. Others said that it sounded like angels.

The voice speaks to Moses in our reading just after Pharaoh had intensified his abuse of the Hebrews in slavery. As Moses continued to advocate for their freedom, Pharaoh intensified his cruelty, forcing them to fashion their bricks without straw, a much more grueling task. This punishment was so severe that it nearly led the Hebrews to despair, and it put great pressure on Moses, who some would have said was the reason for their intensified suffering. And so the voice of God comes to Moses to assure him that he is on the right path. It begins with the unthinkable assertion that God will have it such that it will be Pharaoh *himself* who will release them from slavery.

“Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.”

This cruel, enslaving strong man, God tells Moses, will, when God is done with him, will be the one to let his people go. A great reversal. “Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm, and with great judgments.” God keeps his covenant with his people by making things so difficult for Pharaoh, through ever intensifying plagues, that it is he, the enslaver who frees the Hebrews out of frustration. Now he does repent of this, trying to get his so-called property back, at the

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eleventh hour, losing many horses and riders in the Red Sea in the process. But, that spectacular crossing of the Hebrews, with Moses leading them, might have us forget that it was not technically Moses who freed the slaves, but Pharaoh. What the voice of God foretells to Moses is this great irony. That it is the slaver who will become at a crucial moment the liberator. "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land." And you Moses will take that decision, and run with it, while you can. And so the voice basically says what is going to happen, so that Moses is equipped to endure through the intensifications that must happen for the divine plan to work.

When the voice of God comes to Jesus in our second reading, it is much more punctuated than anything you would read in Exodus. It is just a single sentence. And it comes at a difficult time. Jesus is preaching to his disciples and some Greeks who have come to hear him, and he begins to talk about how the hour of his glory is coming. Now, his hearers would likely have thought he meant victory and triumph over his enemies, a successful reform, or a regime change that would have made them the new rulers, with Christ as King. Well, it is not long after speaking about the hour of his glory, that he continues with themes of death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." and "He that loveth his life shall lose it" He is trying to prepare his disciples and followers for a different kind of glory than they expect, one that will look like the opposite of glory, something like defeat and loss, involving turmoil and death. After Jesus teaches them about a glory that involves death, he is deeply moved, disturbed, for this are heavy matters, even difficult for him to bear. He says, "Now my soul is troubled." And he renounces the temptation to ask the Father to save him from this path. And Jesus looks up to heaven and says "Father, glorify thy name." And a heavenly voice returns with "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

It is an encouraging word, really. A kind of assurance, that goodness and blessing have come before, and that goodness and blessing, glory, will be found even in the horrifying death that is in store for Christ. Just like the voice of God was for Moses to encourage him to stay on his difficult path until that divine reversal of Pharaoh, the slaver becoming, if for a moment, the liberator. In Jesus' case, he is on a path of another kind of divine reversal, where his experience of death will become the path by which we are all saved from death's power.

Somehow, the very worst instrument of cruelty of the time will become a doorway to the divine presence and love. A tool of shame and hate will become the way out of the darkness of both sin and death. As Jesus said, his crucifixion will not prove him to be worthy judgement, but the exact opposite, displaying his innocence and goodness. As he put it "Now is the judgment of this world." The devil's tools will be the devil's undoing. As Jesus put it, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." A new kind of glory has found its way into the world, and is about to be fulfilled on Golgotha, and the voice of God is there to point the way to that fulfillment, not only from the Cross, but then at the Resurrection, where death is trampled by death.

In both cases, the voice of God is in dialogue with those on earth. There is a back and forth. And in that I see a desire, not to overwhelm us, as perhaps seeing his face would, but to bring us along, to convince us of the truth and of the right, if counterintuitive, path, this Way of the Cross that demonstrates a glory, a light, a revelation like no other. As Jesus said, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes." The voice of God comes to encourage, support, and convince. Maybe just to get us through one more day. But if it does anything, I hope it will do what it did for Moses and for Jesus' listeners, give us that little nudge and boost to know what is possible, what divine reversals are in store for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the liberation that comes from a slaver's softened heart, the Way of Death that becomes the Way of True Life, the light that shines in the deepest darkness. As the heavenly voice proclaimed, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again"