

February 11, 2024
The Transfiguration of our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

2 Corinthians 3:12-13; 4:1-6 (Mark 9:2-9)

THE VEIL IS LIFTED AND THE LIGHT OF CHRIST SHINES OUT OF DARKNESS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord. According to Holy Scripture, during His earthly life and ministry, Jesus didn't live for the sake of lording over others like you and I often do. His entire earthly life was dedicated to serving God and man. If Jesus would not have prevented it, the full brightness of His divine glory would've shown through His human nature at all times. But in the interest of His work of salvation He didn't appear as God Himself, but as a Servant. He appeared as an ordinary man, even to the point of dying on the cross. (cf: Philippians 2:8) We see this as even while He publicly healed the sick, blind, lame, and cast out demons, many mistook Him for John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets. (cf: Mark 8:27–28)

Just before He set His face to go to Jerusalem, Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves, and He was transfigured before them. (cf: Luke 9:51; Mark 9:2) His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (cf: Matthew 17:2) To these three disciples and these three alone, Jesus gives a *brief* glimpse of His heavenly, *unveiled divine glory*. He reveals that He's not just another man. Yes, He's fully human, but He's also fully God.

Suddenly Moses, representing the Old Testament Law, and Elijah, representing all the Old Testament prophets, appear and are talking with Jesus. (cf: Mark 9:4) St. Luke's Gospel tells us that they:

“... appeared in glory and spoke of [Jesus' exodus... His] departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:31)

... which is His suffering and death for the life of the world on Calvary's cross.

The Law and Prophets were never an end in themselves, but point *to*, and find their completion *in*, Jesus. They served God's people as teacher and guardian until Christ came. (cf: Galatians 3:24) Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. (cf: Matthew 5:17)

In the chapter leading up to our epistle text this morning, St. Paul has been describing how the Old Testament covenant is replaced in Christ Jesus with the New. He says that while the letter of the law kills, only the Holy Spirit gives life. (cf: 2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

To be sure, the old covenant came with glory, but it was a reflected glory. Paul compares the fading glory of the old covenant to Moses coming down from Mount Sinai after meeting with the Lord God saying:

“... the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end.” (2 Corinthians 3:7)

As you heard in our text:

“... Moses... would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.” (2 Corinthians 3:13)

What St. Paul is teaching is – the Law **cannot** save. It can only show you the depth of your sinfulness. It shows how you deserve eternal damnation and your desperate need for a Savior. Regardless of how good you believe yourself to be and how hard you try, your ability to keep God’s Law always **falls short** of what He demands. You cannot do it.

The Law served as teacher and guardian. The book of Hebrews says:

“... under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22)

Each and every bull and goat that was sacrificed taught that for atonement and forgiveness of sins, **bloodshed was required**. Every year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would present two goats. The **first** would be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies as a sin offering for the people. The **second** would be the innocent scapegoat on which the priest would place his hands and confess all of Israel’s sins and transgressions upon, transferring their guilt onto the scapegoat and then send it out into the wilderness. (cf: Leviticus 16:1–22)

In this manner, God’s people would be learning how the Lord God would redeem the world, by the shedding of innocent blood and transferring our sins to a human Scapegoat. It all pointed ahead to Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. With every Passover celebration, Israel would be taught to look to the Lamb of God, who would once and for all, take away the sins of the world. The old covenant taught a glorious truth, but it was veiled, not fully revealed and intended to fade away.

Unfortunately, even today, many cannot see past the old covenant. All they can see is the demands of God and not the gracious blessings **veiled** within the Law. For them, the truth remains **veiled**. It’s only when God the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens that the **veil** is removed, and the truth is revealed. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible remains a closed book, and we miss seeing the One behind the **veil**. The Law and the Prophets point **to**, and find their completion **in**, Christ Jesus, who was **veiled** in the Old Testament and is now **unveiled** in the New. He’s found on every page of Holy Scripture.

St. Paul is writing to the Christians in Corinth and all who have salvation by trusting in Christ and His **unveiled** Gospel message. God the Holy Spirit, working through the proclaimed Gospel has brought them to faith by the very same means that He has brought you to faith.

Unfortunately, even though Christ has been fully revealed as God’s own Son and Savior of the world, you and I not only attempt to **veil** the truth of the Gospel, we blind ourselves to it as well. Because of being born into sin, you and I and all mankind are natural born enemies of God who daily struggle against our old sinful ways. (cf: Romans 5:8-10) In his Large Catechism Martin Luther writes:

Although we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and are entirely acquitted, yet our life is of such a nature that we stand today, and tomorrow we fall. Therefore, even though we are godly now and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He would not allow us to fall again and yield to trials and temptations. (Large Cat.: Prayer, art. vi, par. 100)

You and I daily struggle against the temptations from the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. The **devil** leads you to despise God's Word and Christ's work of salvation on your behalf. He works to tear you away from faith, hope, and love in Christ, and plunge you into unbelief so that you trust in yourself. The **world** drives you to anger and impatience, hatred and envy, unfaithfulness, vengeance, pride and the desire of power and fame. Regarding the sinful flesh, Luther writes:

For we dwell in the flesh and carry the old Adam about our neck. He exerts himself and encourages us daily to unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deception, to defraud our neighbor and to overcharge him [Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5–8]. In short, the old Adam encourages us to have all kinds of evil lusts, which cling to us by nature and to which we are moved by the society, the example, and what we hear and see of other people. (Large Cat.: Prayer, art. vi, par. 102)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, repent. Repent of all your sins in thought, word, and deed. Repent of those things you have done and left undone. Repent and receive our Lord's forgiveness. He promises to remember your sins and your lawless deeds no more. (cf: Hebrews 10:17) In Jesus' transfiguration, death, and resurrection, God's boundless mercy and love has been **unveiled** and fully **revealed**. Christ Jesus shows Himself to be God covered in human skin and the only Savior of the world. As God's chosen and adopted children, you and I are called to repent of our sins and believe in the **unveiled** Gospel of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus.

In Baptism, you were united to Jesus' death and resurrection, and were clothed with Christ's righteousness and His transfiguration glory. St. Paul writes:

"¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The Law could never produce such a change, because you and I cannot keep the Law perfectly. But the Gospel **can** and **does** produce change. It's the power of God for salvation for all who believe. (cf: Romans 1:16) All Holy Scripture is about Christ. It's all about Christ and what He accomplished for you on the cross. Your transfiguration continues through this life and is completed in eternity. Like Moses' face or like a mirror, you reflect Christ so that people see His glory in you. Like St. Paul, you have a **hope** that you too can be a **bold** servant of Jesus, proclaiming Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior of sinners of which you and I are foremost. (cf: 1 Timothy 1:15) As St. Paul writes in our text:

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:5–6)

God continues His transforming and transfiguring work in you as you continue to hear the Gospel, as you remember your baptismal promises, and as you frequently eat and drink Jesus' body and blood in His Holy Supper. It's a lifelong process, only brought to completion at your exodus and departure into eternal life. (cf: Philippians 1:6)

St. Paul had already faced much tribulation and persecution this far in his ministry. How can he press on in his ministry and not lose heart? It's because it's not about Paul. It's not about Moses or Elijah. It's all about Christ Jesus and Him crucified – and remains so until the end of time. Paul is free, just as you are free. Free to use the opportunities God gives you in your vocation to confess Christ, knowing that the results are up to God the Holy Spirit. St. Paul doesn't have to resort to:

“... disgraceful, underhanded ways...” (2 Corinthians 4:2)

He doesn't have to resort to deception, and he doesn't have to sugarcoat the Word of God to make it more palatable or pleasing. There were plenty those types of false preachers in Paul's day just as there are in ours.

Simply confess Christ when and where God gives opportunity and let God give the growth. (cf: 1 Corinthians 3:7) If the message is joyfully received – thanks be to God! If it's rejected, and ***know*** that at times ***it will be*** rejected, it's only rejected because:

“... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Don't lose heart, because the results aren't your responsibility. It's the Holy Spirit who thaws stone cold hearts. It's God alone who creates and sustains faith. As a Baptized and forgiven believer for whom the Holy Spirit has lifted the veil, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are enabled to be a bold confessor of the new covenant in Christ proclaiming:

“... the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.