

Seeing the Glory

Transfiguration Sunday

February 27, 2022

2nd Corinthians 3:12-4:2

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit... ¹ Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Luke 9: 28-43

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, in those days, told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.



Today we draw to the close of our “Love Never Ends” series.

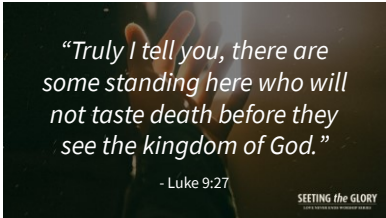
Just as we began in Luke’s gospel with the baptism of

Christ, today we conclude once again in Luke’s gospel, with

the transfiguration of Christ. In our passage from Luke 9 we catch a glimpse of perhaps what resurrection might be like as we see Jesus in a transfigured or changed state. We also will touch on one more passage from Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church.

In this week's epistle reading we find Paul once again trying to work through a problem or controversy that the church members have gotten themselves into. In today's reading we find what we have found each week: a consistent message that people matter, that community matters, and that individuals are a part of the whole. Over the last two weeks, we have touched on the resurrection of the dead. Even while glimpsing into eternity and into the joy that will come on that day, we were reminded that we live in grace and joy and love in this life too, right here and now. In our passage from Luke, we see both of these aspects of faith – the one day and the present day, which are both reflections of the Christ that we love and strive to follow. As we prepare to enter this time together, let us pray...

Turn with me to Luke 9, verse 28, as we begin. Our passage begins with, *"Now about eight days after these sayings..."* Luke is probably referring to the most recent conversations and he is implying that they are connected to what happens in today's text. Earlier in chapter 9, in response to asking the disciples who they think he is, Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus then plainly tells the disciples about the suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection soon to befall him. Jesus follows this up with an explanation of what life will be like for his followers after he rises to heaven. Jesus speaks of taking up their crosses and of denying self. He speaks of losing their lives for the sake of the gospel. Leading directly into today's passage, Jesus says, *"Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."* Do you think Peter, James, and John realized later that Jesus was talking about them here?



"Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

- Luke 9:27

SEEKING THE GLORY

As our passage begins, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him, up the mountain, to pray. While Jesus is praying, everything changes. In an instance, we read, *“the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”* While change is something we are familiar with, it is not always something we like. Yet change is always happening, isn’t it? In fact, change happens to us all. In both our spiritual and physical lives, we are constantly in the process of shedding the old self and putting on the new. Last week, it was the seed that changed – dying to bring new life in the plant. It was the Adam in us, the man of the dust, dying so that the new Adam, Christ, could grow and become more and more visible within us. Physically we change all the time too. For example, every minute our bodies create about 300 million cells to replace the ones that just died. From a broader perspective, even when taken over a relatively short period of time, we can all reflect on how we have changed – some have grown taller, some wider, some greyer – depending on our age. Our gospel lesson is about change too. But it is a different kind of change, a spiritual kind of change.

Hear again verse 29: *“the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”* When the disciples blinked, Jesus was different. Transfigured is the word we

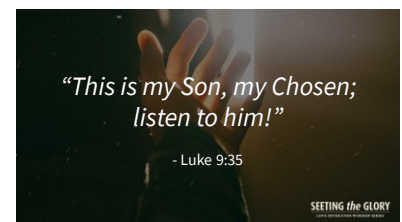
most often use for this change that occurred on the top of the mountain. We call today “Transfiguration Sunday” in the church world. It is maybe a more holy or fancier word for the Greek word that also translates to ‘metamorphosis’. This is a word that we use in science too. It is what happens when the moth becomes a butterfly. It is what happens when rock is heated up really hot and flows from one form into another. More on that later!



As the disciples blinked, Jesus became something that they had never seen before. I cannot imagine what it would be like to try and describe something that has never been seen before. What words could you possibly use to describe something beyond your imagination and reality? The disciples used words that best described what they were seeing. “Dazzling white” or “like lightning” in another translation – that’s the closest they could come. And just as suddenly, Moses and Elijah were there with Jesus. These two titans of the Old Testament were like Jesus: “*they appeared in glory.*” The three spoke of Jesus’ coming departure and about what was going to happen in Jerusalem. It is a story that the disciples have heard before. Just recently, as a matter of fact.



As it appears that Moses and Elijah are about to depart, Peter blurts out, “*Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*” Peter wants to preserve this moment, to remain in the presence of the holy, right then and there where he was seeing the glory. ‘Let’s just stay right here, Jesus.’ That’s what Peter is really saying. Peter does not want the current situation to change. It is then that God speaks, reassuring Peter, James, and John. God says, “*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*” This is similar to what God said at Jesus’ baptism. At the start of Jesus’ ministry, God declared Jesus to be the beloved, the one with whom God was well pleased. Here, on the mountain top, God is telling the disciples to listen to Jesus, to cling to his words, to lean into Jesus, to allow him to guide them through the difficulties that lie ahead. God is reminding the disciples and us that Jesus is capable, worthy, able to walk the valleys with us. To a degree this is a good reminder as we stand on the edge of the season of Lent.



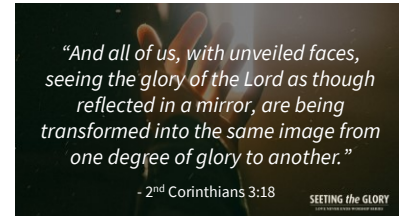
Lent and the journey to the cross is a strenuous and challenging one if we take it seriously, if we are willing to heed the words and example of Jesus, if we are willing to allow them to transform us. Lent is a season that invites us to see the glory of following and becoming more and more like Christ. Lent is about change, about transformation, about metamorphosis. That is part of the message from God to Peter, James, and John too. God is reminding them that they are a work in progress, that they still have much more to learn, to become – so they need to listen. Who and what they are as they stand wide-eyed and open-mouthed on the mountain is just the beginning stages of who and what they will be as they take the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Leading into this experience on the mountaintop, Jesus spoke of the change wrought through faith, of denying self and of carrying a cross. It will not be easy. Change sometimes is hard too. Sometimes it tests us. And some of the time it refines and reshapes us in ways we would have never predicted or foreseen.



To explore this idea, please turn with me to 2nd Corinthians 3. In the verses leading into our passage for today, Paul spoke of the ministry of the Spirit in the lives of the believers. Paul reminded the church that the Spirit ministers to believers, guiding them to “justification” – the process of being made right with God. This too is a metamorphosis process. Paul elevates the process led by the Spirit over the old way – the way of the Law that began with Moses. The old way, the sacrificial system, atoned or paid for their sin, but the guilt and shame remained. Through Jesus’ work on the cross, Paul declares believers justified – made holy and righteous again before God.

As our passage begins, Paul declares that since we are made right with God, we can *“act with great boldness.”* For Paul, justification brings the freedom we find in Christ.

In verse 16 Paul declares that *“When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”* When we choose to walk with Jesus, the Spirit enters our hearts and begins to work in us. In verse 18 Paul speaks of the change that occurs: *“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”* The



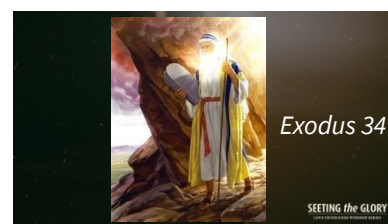
transformation that occurs in us is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus – going *“from one degree of glory to another”*. In our lives it is sometimes our sin that keeps us from seeing the glory of God. Sin can become the veil that lies over our eyes and hearts, preventing the work of the Spirit, preventing us from seeing and becoming what God created and designed us to be. The sins of arrogance and superiority can also act as a veil, limiting how we can see and understand and, consequently, minister to others.

As we turn back to Luke 9, to the second half of our passage, this is the story of the father. The boy’s demon possession kept the father from seeing clearly who his son was and who he could be. The next day, after coming down from the mountain, we see that a great crowd gathers around Jesus. In verse 38, a man from the crowd cries out to Jesus, *“Teacher, I beg you to look at my son.”* His only son is possessed by an unclean spirit. It seizes and convulses and mauls the boy. The man came to the disciples for healing, but they could not cast the demon out. After lamenting the faithless and perverse generation, Jesus tells the man to bring his son.

As I consider this statement from Jesus about those gathered there that day, I wonder: was it spoken at the crowd or what is simply spoken about the crowd – an observation more than an indictment?

The father and Jesus are such contrasts in both place and position. The transfiguration reveals who and what Jesus is: God in the flesh, strong, powerful, glorious, holy. The father comes begging for help. He is weak, powerless, defeated. He is vulnerable. Jesus certainly could have enjoyed his place of superiority, being comfortable with who and what he was and is. We have all certainly enjoyed or relished in our place of superiority over others, being comfortable that we are not them or in their position. We have all had the sins of arrogance and superiority cloud our vision and our hearts. That is not the way of Jesus. At times we find ourselves in the place the father finds himself too – weak, powerless, defeated, vulnerable. When we find ourselves there, do we dare to reach out to Jesus as the father did?

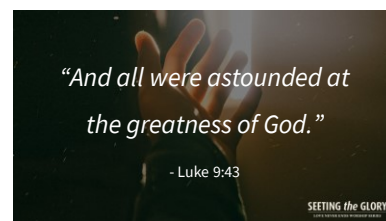
In the Old Testament passage for this week, in Exodus 34, Moses spends time with God and becomes radiant, reflecting the glory of God. Instead of allowing this to create a barrier, Moses chooses the path of humility. Moses chooses to wear a veil to express solidarity with and compassion for the people. Moses chooses to act in a way that include others, that allows for a way to be together in community. When we are tempted to allow division or to create separation between ourselves and others, how do we choose to do what Moses did? How do we do that? One way would be to do what Greg Gibson did as revealed in the skit shared last Sunday – to follow his heart, to meet and talk with a man that many hated and avoided.



We can also create community and allow space for the other in small ways. A little way might be to not be put off by another's language or dress or appearance. Over the past few weeks, I was blessed to develop a connection with a woman named Jacqi. As I shared at her celebration of life gathering, she was a little unfiltered.

I could have been offended or put off or bothered by some of the language in the text messages that we exchanged. I could have tried to act all religious or superior. But to enter into relationship sometimes requires us to veil those initial thoughts, to refrain from being critical or judgmental. A little cursing was not going to cause the world to come to an end. When we see and accept and meet the other where they are at, it allows us to be more open to the other and to their situation or circumstances. This is how and where Jesus met the father as he came seeking healing for his only son.

As the father and son approach, the demon throws the boy to the ground in convulsions. Jesus rebukes the spirit and heals the boy. The passage closes with these words: *"And all were astounded at the greatness of God."*



When we enter into that sacred space, into that place of vulnerability, we can meet someone like the father in Luke 9 – one in need of what we can offer or give. When we do so, when we step beyond our comfort zone, every now and then we catch a glimpse of God at work in our life, in the life of another, or in the world. Every now and then we have a mountaintop experience. Every once in a while, we catch a glimpse of something bigger, of something more profound. Every now and then we hear a word

that reverberates in our soul, the resonates with our spirit. Every now and then a tear comes to our eye as we stand in the presence of God, perhaps as we surround a friend to pray him off on the next stage of his journey.



Every once in a while we get that lump in our throat, swelling as we encounter the depths of love and sacrifice. Every once in a while, we are blessed by seeing the glory, the glory of the Father's only Son. It is in these moments, I believe, that we are coming closest to what we will be like in heaven because in these moments we best reflect the Jesus in each of us.

Every now and then we catch a glimpse of Jesus' face. Sometimes it is revealed to us as we look in the mirror or as we reflect back on our day. Sometimes we see it in the face of another. In those moments – whether personal and intimate or whether lived out in the world - all we see is love, a love so deep that he would die for us, a love so deep that he would take on our sins, a love so deep that it always seeks to change us, to transform us, to make us into something new and righteous and holy. It is a love that overcomes our sins and failures. It is a love that never ends. It is a love that draws us ever closer to the spirit, to the *pnuema*, to the holy presence, to the spark of the divine within us. Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When have you recently experienced metamorphosis or new life? How can you share this story with others, helping them to see Christ's glory?
- 2) *Pray*. What places in your heart need God's transforming power to be at work? Pray for a powerful and impactful journey through the season of Lent.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 6:22-24. As we prepare to enter Lent, how can you seek to have eyes filled with light and to live a life that serves God alone?