

**+ 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 + Reflect the Light of the Glorified Christ¹ +
+ Last Sunday after Epiphany: Transfiguration of Our Lord + 15 February 2015 +**

What do people see when they look at you? Of course, they see how you look, how you dress, how you take care of yourself. They may see signs that you're getting older. Maybe they see that you have a certain fashion sense or that you are or once were physically fit. They may see that you don't get a lot of sleep, that you're not feeling well, or that today is the best day of your life. Like the saying goes, you can't judge a book by its cover, but you can learn a lot about a person from what you see.

So what do you think the Israelites thought when they saw the prophet Moses come down from Mount Sinai? They had seen some pretty amazing things from Moses as God used him to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. With confidence in the Lord, Moses had stood up to Pharaoh—the mighty ruler of the Egyptian empire. With unbelievable trust, Moses had calmed the people's fears as the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea. They had also seen terrifying anger from Moses. The last time he came down from the mountain, he had found them worshiping a golden calf and the Lord's anger burned through him, but not this time.

This time Moses looked different. He had been up on that mountain with the Lord for forty days. When he came down his face literally shone with the glory of the Lord. No one knew what to do. So they did what people who don't know what to do typically do. They avoided Moses and didn't want to get anywhere near this man whose face radiated with the glory of the holy God. Moses actually had to summon them so he could speak to Israel the very words and commands of God himself. His bright, shining face was proof that he was proclaiming the true Word of God and that he had seen the Lord face to face. He reflected the glory of God.

The Israelites would see that glory of the Lord reflect from Moses' face time and again over the years. Every time Moses spoke with the Lord in the tabernacle, he would come out shining. The people would see that God had spoken and that his glory was coming to them through his prophet.

Whenever he finished speaking, however, Moses covered his face with a veil. He did it ***“to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.”*** Now why would he do that? He wasn't suddenly self-conscious of his new look. Instead Moses didn't want them to think that God's glory doesn't last or that God's Word could potentially lose its power. In that way he reflected God's glory even when his face stopped shining.

Leap ahead 1,500 years and we find Peter, James, and John cowering on a mountaintop. Jesus looks pretty different. He was transfigured before their eyes shining with a brilliant light. They were shocked. They were amazed beyond belief. They were terrified. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. Then as a glorious cloud enveloped them all, they heard the stunning voice of God the Father declare that Jesus was his beloved Son. Peter had the brilliant idea to preserve that glory by offering to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, but like that, it all ended and Jesus looked just as human as before.

What they had seen was simply glorious. You can imagine how fast their minds were moving to describe what they had seen to their fellow disciples, but Jesus stopped them short. He didn't want that glimpse of glory to overshadow his greater glory to come—glory that would be veiled in pain and death. He wanted his disciples to realize that that was most glorious.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus' followers continued to reflect that glorious light of Christ—and people had a hard time understanding why. For example, as the Christians embraced and rejoiced in the cross—a notorious tool of Roman execution, the Jews wondered what was wrong with the Christians. “Why do they find such confidence, such joy in a leader who died such a humiliating death?” Rather than see the glory of Christ, ***“...their minds were made dull, for...when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts...”***

The Jews still looked to the fading glory of Moses, to the old laws and commands as the source of their eternal glory. They thought that if they could follow God's commands, they could be righteous in his sight. With such dull minds and veiled hearts, they saw no need for Jesus, but instead looked for saving glory within themselves. The veil of their unbelief hid the glorified Christ from their view and caused them to reject his light.

Many today still have a hard time understanding followers of Christ. They wonder, “Why base your life on some ancient book? Why bother with the old-fashioned idea that there is real truth in this world, that there is absolute right and wrong? Why believe in that myth of a man, Jesus?” A veil covers their hearts. Most people don't see

¹ Some of the thoughts and language from this sermon were received with thanks from a 2012 sermon by Pr. Joel Vogel. http://www.crownlutheran.org/home/140001453/140001453/docs/2%20Corinthians%203.12-4.2.doc?sec_id=140001453

any need to look outside of themselves for what they need or want. If there is such a thing as heaven, they're pretty sure they'll get in because they've been pretty good. The only glory they need is that of their own making. So their hearts remain veiled.

When people look at you, shouldn't they see you reflecting the glorified Christ? After all, you have seen the glory of Christ our Savior. So that light should shine from you brightly into this dark world as you reflect the glorified Christ in your life. That glory should shine because we ought to listen only to what is good and look only at what is pure and speak only what is true. The humble recognition of who you really are by nature should be seen by all. We have the glory of God's mercy, so that mercy should easily flow from each of us. Others should expect us to reflect the glory of Christ.

...But is that what people see when they look at you? Is the light of the glorified Christ really reflecting off your face? Too often your mouth twists the truth about others to suit your own purposes. Too often your ears love to hear the misery and mistakes of others. Too often eyes wish to look upon what God has clearly forbidden. Then to make matters worse, we pretend to cover our sins with self-righteous thoughts. "At least I'm not as bad as so-and-so. I'm doing okay with God." Arrogance and contempt replace humility and mercy, but do you see what's happening here? The veil of unbelief covers our hearts, and we forget that there is no redeeming glory within us.

What happens if that veil is never lifted? You'll never see the glory of the Lord in the glories of heaven. All you will see is the condemnation of the holy God and separation from his love for eternity in the fires of hell, but don't lose hope! Jesus is here to remove that veil and let his glory shine in your life.

The Apostle writes, "***The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.***" By nature, you and I would never know that a veil of unbelief rests over our hearts, but the Spirit of the Lord brings freedom. Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit shows you that you cannot possibly rely on your own glory or goodness to save you from God's wrath. So through that same Word of God, he shows you the glorified Christ.

The Holy Spirit shows you Jesus—the Savior whom his disciples saw on that mountain. The Spirit shows you that Jesus is the fullness of God in human flesh, that he is God's one and only Son, that he is beloved by the Father because of his perfect obedience, and that he was sent to save us. Through the Gospel, the Spirit shows you the almighty Jesus humbly turning towards the cross, suffering the condemnation and death that we all deserve. He shows you Jesus rising triumphantly from the grave, then ascending into heavenly glory to rule over all things for you and me.

As the Holy Spirit shows you all this in his Word, he yanks away the veil so you can fully see the glory of God in Christ Jesus. The Spirit turns your eyes to see and trust the glorified Jesus and what he has done for you.

Now you are free—free from the thought of ever having to do it on your own. Free from the idea that you could ever be good enough for God. Free from every sin you have ever committed, from every moment that you failed to reflect the glory of God. You are free from the terrors of death, from the threats of Satan, from hell itself. The light of the glorified Christ shines on you and never fades away, and someday you will see that glory in full.

Now you reflect the light of the glorified Christ! Paul tells us, "***And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.***" Through the glory of Christ's love and mercy, he's changing you to be more like him. Because he washed you clean of all sin through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, you can't help, but want to follow in his footsteps. Because he offers you himself in his Holy Supper for your full and free forgiveness, he empowers you to live, speak, look, and listen as he did. As you listen to his Word, you reflect his glory.

The veil has been removed. You have seen the light of the glorified Christ. So be bold in the hope that you have. Tell others how the Spirit of the Lord has set you free. Let the glory of Christ shine through every aspect of your life—your words, your actions, your priorities, your decisions. This light of the glorified Christ cannot fade and will not be overcome. You have been transformed by a glorious Savior. So reflect the light of the glorified Christ every day in every way until you see his glory face to face in heaven. Amen.