

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.¹⁸ 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.

4 *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2)*

Reflect the Lord's Glory!

A couple of weeks ago, someone asked one of our teachers, "What's this epiphany that pastor keeps talking about? I thought epiphany is when you figured something out." That was a really good question. Sometimes we speak of an epiphany as an "aha moment" when we realize something we didn't understand before. That may not sound like it has anything to do with this season of the church year, but it actually does. The basic meaning of the word epiphany is manifestation or revelation. It means that you see something real. It's a pretty short step from that to understanding something for the first time. In the season of Epiphany, we're seeing Jesus for who he really is: the Son of God and the Savior of the world. That means we see his glory. Not literally, of course. We see his glory in the Bible. Today, in our gospel lesson, Jesus pulls back the veil and lets his disciples see that glory shining from his face and clothing. And in our epistle from today, St. Paul calls us to reflect that glory. That's a pretty good place to finish this Epiphany Season. **Reflect the Lord's glory!**

I.

To reflect that glory, it has to shine on you first, right? When the sun shines on all the snow we got this weekend, the light reflects back into our eyes. You need sunglasses. What's the purpose of those sunglasses? To block the light so that it doesn't blind us. St. Paul uses the 1st century equivalent of sunglasses in our text this morning: veils. That's what you used to block the light then. He's not talking about sunlight, but about the light of Christ. My friends, **reflect the Lord's glory! The veil has been removed from your hearts!**

The light of Christ shines in our hearts. But St. Paul looks back 1500 years from his time, and he talks about Moses. God appeared to Moses at Mt. Sinai – and indeed, during the entire forty years that the children of Israel were in the desert. And after meeting with God, Moses' face would shine with the glory of the Lord. Now, it would fade. But when he first came out, it blazed with light. How would that make you feel? The children of Israel were afraid. That's almost always how sinners react to God's glory in the Bible. So Moses got into the habit of covering his face with a veil. Not a flimsy, see through thing. But a thick piece of cloth that blocked that light until it faded.

St. Paul uses that image of the veil to make a spiritual point: Just as Moses hid that physical glory by putting a veil over his face, a veil also covers the hearts of the people of Israel so that they do not see the true glory of the Old Testament covenant. That means Paul had to reverse the picture: Moses used the veil to keep light in, while Paul speaks of a veil keeping the light out of their hearts. But the veil blocks the light. What does he mean?

The whole Old Testament is really about Christ. It's the story of how God brought the world into existence and then when Adam and Eve sinned, how God managed the affairs of the whole world so that in the little town of Bethlehem in the days of Herod the king, a Savior was born who was Christ, the Lord. Again and again in the Old Testament God taught his people to expect Christ. Sometimes, he had a prophet tell them what Jesus would do. But through Moses, God gave them the Old Covenant. He told them what they could eat and what they couldn't, what they could do and what they couldn't. He gave them the tabernacle and priests and

sacrifices. Every one of those rules was a picture of Jesus. That's why we can speak of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins.

But Paul says, **“But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.”** Jewish people read the Old Covenant in the Bible. They view it as the heart and core of their religion. The meaning of those words has not changed. But they don't see Christ in that covenant. They don't see every bloody sacrifice as a picture of Christ offering his life to save them. Why not? A veil covers their hearts, a veil that is only taken away in Christ. They don't believe. If you don't believe in Jesus you are not going to see what God really says in the Scriptures and so the vast majority of the Jewish people down through the ages have missed the eternal life God held out to them in Christ.

And that's tragic, because God moved heaven and earth to make them his people. God still wants them to hear and believe and by his grace, some do. But most reject Christ and so when they hear all these words that are really talking about him, they have to understand them differently. But my friends, what happens when Jewish people read the Scriptures, also happens when non-Jews read it. Paul says, **“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”** Before you turn to Christ, before you become a believer, there is a veil covering your heart. That veil, that thick piece of cloth that no light can pierce and that keeps you from seeing and understanding what God says is unbelief. No unbeliever can truly understand what the Scriptures say.

Now, because God did use human language to give us the Scriptures, it is possible for an unbeliever to understand what the words are saying. If they couldn't, no one would ever come to faith. But even when they do understand, they don't believe the message, they will always conclude that it's nonsense. The blogosphere is full of people like that. Of course, many of those people have no clue what the Bible says and that's part of the veil, too. But sadly, it's not hard to find people who claim to be religious, who claim to honor Jesus and his Word and who clearly do know what the Bible says, but who do not believe it. They reject the idea that God sent Jesus to die for your sins. So they have to take literally hundreds, if not thousands of verses, and twist them to mean something completely different. In the end, all false doctrine comes from unbelief twisting and misunderstanding God's Word. So the veil can be everything from total inability even to understand what the Bible says to a knowing rejection and ridicule of its message.

Understand, we're not just talking about other people. Do you find the Bible hard to understand? If your heart were perfect, you would understand all that God says. The fact that we misunderstand comes from that unbeliever that lives inside us. All the times that we want God to say something different than what he really says, all the times that we try to rationalize what God says and make it agree with what we want to hear, we show that sin lives in our hearts. We were born unbelievers and that Old Man inside us wants to go back to that state. Don't we all have to admit that it's a constant struggle to face up to what God really says, to understand it and accept it and love it? That's because our sinful hearts want something else.

By rights, God should send us all to hell for that sin. But the message of the whole Bible – including the message of the Mt. Sinai covenant – is that God sent his Son to die for our sins, to spill his blood and suffer our death and then to rise and wipe away all our guilt. God did all that for you. As your pastor, I forgive you for all the times the sinner inside led you away from the Word of God.

But you already know all that. In that respect, you have a tremendous gift of God. Even though we sinners sometimes misunderstand and even want God to say something different, when God gave us faith, he put the New Man in our hearts. He took the veil the away! Now, it is possible for us to hear and understand what God says correctly. There are still lots of difficult passages we may wrestle with. God sends pastors and teachers to help us understand correctly. But you, by the grace of God, begin with the understanding – with the epiphany – that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. So in the Word of God, you do see his glory.

II.

St. Paul calls the unbelief that contaminates and blinds every human heart a veil. But he also uses the image of a veil another way: to speak of the failure of Christians to give a clear testimony of Christ. He starts this reading by saying, **“Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.”** You can be bold! That's the point of the lesson today. **Reflect the Lord's glory! Remove the veil from your face!**

How do we do that? By the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says that we are also **“being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** So while we plod along down here, doing our best to reflect the glory of Christ, we are in the process of being transformed. God isn’t done with us yet. We still have that Old Man interfering with our best efforts to reflect the glory of Christ. Sometimes, it’s going to feel like we failed. Sometimes our sin is going to get in the way and we’re just going to hang our heads because we did fail. We veiled the glory of Christ. We were too afraid to speak or to caught in sin to think about the message our words and actions sent.

But Jesus paid for that sin, too. God is still working in our hearts. The Holy Spirit comes every time we hear about Jesus, every time we confess our sins and hear that we are forgiven, every time we remember that in baptism he washed our sins away, every time that we come to communion and receive his body and blood. And in all that gospel, he changes us. Now, sometimes, he works so slowly that we can’t feel any change at all. But Paul says that we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ with ever increasing glory. When I was in catechism class, an uncle came to visit our family. He was in the navy and had been out of the country for several years. His wife was stunned by how big my brother and I were. For my mom and dad, that growth had come little by little. Now, I’m sure they had those moments when they looked at us and realized how much bigger we were. But on any given day, it probably didn’t feel like we were bigger than the day before. On any given day, it probably doesn’t feel like we’ve been changed to be more like Christ, like our faith is stronger and the Old Man is weaker, like we are reflecting more of God’s glory today than yesterday. But that glory is ever increasing. Every time we hear the gospel, we grow.

So Paul says, **“We do not lose heart.”** Now, he is talking about the ministry, but what he says applies to us all. Because we have the grace of God in Christ, even when it seems like our ministry is going nowhere, even when it seems like nothing we do works, even when we’re frustrated with our congregation, we do not lose heart. We trust in the power of God working in the gospel. We trust in God’s plan to spread that gospel. It’s been working for thousands of years!

Then he says, **“We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”** It all comes down to the word. All God calls us to do is to present that word. He does the rest. How can we be bold? By resisting all temptations to come up with a gimmick that will trick people into believing, by resisting all the wisdom of our age that says that we need a new message for the church that resonates with people more than sin and grace, by resisting every temptation to put our smarts and our insight ahead of the simple word of God, and by trusting in that word to do everything. When we trust God’s Word, we will say what God says even when unbelievers ridicule it and other Christians resist the hard truths of God’s Word.

In that word, we see the glory of Christ. Through that word, the Holy Spirit works. By the power of that word, we reflect his glory. If we keep proclaiming the good news about Jesus, if we stand on what God says, no matter how unpopular it is, then we will reflect the glory of Christ. We can do that because God took the veil of unbelief off our hearts and showed us that glory. We can do that because God the Holy Spirit is changing us to be more like Christ every day. Reflect his glory! Amen.