

Removing the Veil

II Corinthians 3:12-4:2

A man was on his way to church one Sunday morning as the church bells were ringing through the mountains of central Europe. As he walked past a shepherd ^{boy} ~~by~~, he noted the boy kneeling and reciting the alphabet. The man stopped to ask the boy what he was doing. The boy answered that he was praying. The man responded that he had never heard a prayer like that and wondered what kind of prayer that was. The boy answered that he had never learned any prayers but he wanted to pray. So he concluded that if he said all the letters of the alphabet, God would hear them and put them together for him, spelling out what ought to be expressed in prayer! As strange as that may sound to us, the fact of the matter is, many of us have difficulty expressing ourselves to God or discerning how God expresses himself to us. We have trouble speaking with God or allowing God to speak with us.

It's as if we go around with veils over our faces, not to keep the glory of God from shining out of us, but to keep God's glory from shining into us. We don't see the whole truth but like to take a snippet of the truth and claim it as our way of doing faith. We can see this clearly when we take a look at the denominationalism in protestant churches in the United States, each claiming to have the way to salvation. Some claim that women should be silent in churches and are not allowed to become pastors, and they can back those claims up through scripture. Some claim that it is wrong to play cards, dance, or drink and they can back it up through scripture. Some claim that homosexuality is a sin and can back it up through scripture. Some claim that homosexuality is not a sin and can back it up through scripture. Some claim that divorce, abortion, war and a host of other things is wrong and can back it up with scripture. Some believe that it is OK to engage in those activities and can back it up with scripture. This Holy Book we revere and proclaim as God's word can be dangerous and has caused many unjust actions to happen. Did you know that at one time slavery was justified through scripture, wife beating had a justification through scripture. We can use Scripture to justify almost anything we want. We often go to Scripture with a bias and want that bias justified rather than find the truth of God. We go with a veil over our faces and our minds. We go to scripture with wishful thinking, hoping to find the answers that we already have formed and neglect what we do not want to see. We engage in

fragmentary thinking, looking at only parts, not the whole. We as Christians have a whole lot of conflict about the “right” way of following Christ, most of it justified through scripture.

So, how do we know what is right and true and of God when we think about how we live out of faith, how we follow Christ? Paul gives us some pretty significant clues in today’s lesson. He states that we see, with unveiled faces, the glory of the Lord reflected in a mirror. Christ has removed the veil that keeps us from seeing God’s glory, yet when those veils are removed, we still only see a reflection of that glory and we begin the process of transformation that moves us to seeing more and more clearly the glory of God. This process of transformation requires change and we so often do not want to change. So we put the veil back on and stay stuck in our belief or unbelief. And we do just fine that way until a crisis in our lives forces us to turn to our faith for support, strength and answers. In a significant crisis we may find that our faith seems woefully inadequate to help us meet the needs that have arisen. We suddenly find a gray area that contradicts what we thought we believed. But also in a crisis, the veil can be removed and we find that a deeper faith emerges as we walk through the crisis hand in hand with the one who helps us see our way through. It is God that removes the veil and helps us see more clearly what is at stake.

Jesus Christ is the revealer of God, the Lord of our lives, the Spirit who transforms us into the same image of Christ and closer to what we can know about God’s glory. If we contemplate Jesus Christ often enough and deeply enough we will come to reflect him. This Jesus we talk about and worship with had no other desire than to love and serve God. Only Jesus truly knows the depths of God’s love and wants to bring us to know it as well. So, where else would we turn to find the truth about God? Jesus is reflected in Scripture, but more than that, Jesus is reflected in our very souls as we encounter the living Christ. In Scripture we see Jesus earnestly trying to reveal God to his disciples and to those who were being healed and those who were listening. He wanted them to know who he was because in knowing who he was, they would be able to know who God was much more clearly.

We reflect whatever is at the center of our lives. It governs our decisions and bears on all our actions. Jesus had God at the center of his life and God was what he reflected. What do we have at the center of our lives? What do we reflect? Is it wealth or power or prestige? Or do we reflect Christ and the love of God that he exemplified?

Let's imagine going up on that mountain that Jesus took his three disciples to. Then let's imagine that we suddenly, out of nowhere see two more figures talking with Jesus. They haven't come from anywhere that could be seen. They just suddenly appeared. And then we respond. Not knowing what else to do, we suggest that three shelters be built to provide the "guests" with shelter from the sun. We don't understand, we don't get it. They do not need shelter. They are only there to reveal something about Jesus, that Jesus is Lord of the past, present and future, that Jesus is the Son of God, capable of communicating with those who have gone before him into the glory of God. This is a precious time of glimpse, of experiencing the glory of God, with veils off.

We have moments like that, not quite so outstanding and miraculous. We catch those glimpses of truth by paying attention to what God is doing around us. We get those glimpses of truth by spending time in prayer, not just asking prayer, but full bodied, deep prayer that rises from our souls and seeks the presence of God and dares to spend some holy moments in the presence of the Other. It is the Spirit that is constantly trying to lead us to those moments, to take away that which clouds our spiritual vision, to give us glimpses of a much larger and sometimes overwhelming picture of what God is about and doing. And from that framework our faith grows and deepens.

It is because we see God's glory reflected that we can not believe that our faith is completed. There is so much more to learn about God, to know about God and the power of what God has done in Jesus.

The other day I asked God what He wanted people to know about him. And he replied, "Look to Jesus. See how he healed and fed and loved and cared." And again I asked God what He wanted people to know about Him. And he said, "Look to Jesus. Hear what he said and how he silenced the arrogant." Again I asked God what he wanted people to know about him. And he replied, "Look to Jesus. Feel his compassion for those who are troubled and alone and isolated." Once again I asked God what he wanted people to know about him. And he said, "Look to Jesus. experience how he suffered ridicule, and pain and death." And yet once again I demanded of God what he wanted people to know about him. And he wrapped me in close and whispered, "Look to Jesus. Know that he emptied the tomb of its power in his obedience and love for me, and calls all to himself to reveal my glory. If you

want to see and know me, look to Jesus. He is the mirror that reflects me. When you know him, then you know me.” And I was satisfied.

And so I tell you that if you want to know about God, look to Jesus. He is the true window to God. We see god reflected in him. We have the gift of Scripture to guide us, but there is so much more than just the printed Word. We have the Spirit to guide us, the Spirit that helps us interpret not only scripture, but the very makeup of life and how God is working in life. The Word must be planted so deeply within us that we continue to find its treasure and its guidance as life unfolds around and within us.