**2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2** February 7, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Transfigurations Sunday

*2Corinthians 3:12 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.*

*4:1 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Looking Straight Into the Son**

**I. Not Covered in a Veil – The Old Covenant**

Mark Kasese was a member of a Lutheran church in Zambia. He was blind. He was blind because for many years he had been a welder, and as will happen where there are virtually no workplace regulations, he usually welded without a welding mask. And so he went blind. Welding without eye protection is… not good.

So, is that what is with Moses and his shining face and the veil? We heard about it both in the Old Testament reading and our sermon text. Was the veil some sort of welding mask shielding against the light?

Moses lived at one of the three or four pivot points of Israel’s history. The great event he lived through was the Israelites coming out of their land of slavery. It was their birth, not as a tribe, but as a nation. When they came out of Egypt, instead of God leading the Israelites directly northeast to Canaan, the promised land, he led them south. God wanted them to see something out in the desert, at a mountain called Sinai. They camped at the foot of the mountain. Is was covered with black clouds and lightning. Out of the thunder God called Moses up the mountain. Many days later Moses came down and proclaimed God’s laws to Israel. And here is how the Israelites knew it was not just Moses being a dictator: when Moses spoke, *“His face was radiant.”* (Exodus 34:29). He was shining with God’s glory. When he was done speaking God’s Word, the glory faded away.

Now if it had been me, I probably would have done it this way. While my face was glowing, I would have put the veil on, and then when my face stopped glowing, I would have taken the veil off. But God always does things a different way, and he has a reason. Instead, when Moses was proclaiming the words straight from God, the people had to look at his shining, unveiled face. Then, when Moses was done speaking, the shining went away and he covered his face so that people wouldn’t see him without glory. Their only impression of him would be that of “Moses with the shining face”. They never saw the plain old Moses. Why?

You know how it is with us. What is amazing on Sunday is the new normal on Monday, and thrown in the trash on Tuesday. The English explorer James Cook, when he first arrived in Hawaii, the native people thought he was a god—different skin, different clothes, carrying a thunderstick that could kill a bird at a hundred yards. Things only gods could do. And then the Hawaiians watched the explorers and saw them eat and sleep. They saw selfish brawling drunkards and realized they were not gods. So much did familiarity breed contempt that when Captain Cook landed on Hawaii the second time, they killed him.

The veil that Moses wore was a reminder that Moses had spoken God’s word. And even though he was just a person, he was still God’s spokesman. The Israelites were not supposed to look at him as an ordinary person. Moses’ veil served the opposite purpose of a welding mask.

Or to put it another way, the veil wasn’t to hide the glory of God, but to hide the unglory of the imperfect man Moses. And the veil was there to hide the fact that the laws given through Moses were temporary. And the veil was a reminder that that temporary law code was insufficient to save anyone, but that it pointed forward to a better reality.

That’s what is behind these words of the reading, ***“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… To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read… Only in Christ is it taken away.”***

Paul says that the faith revealed in Christ does not have to mess with veils. We don’t have all the sacrifices and Sabbath laws, etc. because a new age dawned with Jesus. The covenant of forgiveness in Jesus is permanent and effective. The function of the veil was to hide the incompleteness of the old ways. ***“In Christ it is taken away.”***

But many people still like the idea of a covenant like that given on Mt. Sinai. How many people think that making the right laws will make this a Christian nation? How many people think that being Christian is mostly about acting decent, being friendly and helpful. Don’t get me wrong. Those are good things, and our New Testament tells us that, *“Faith without works is dead.”* But faith is always first before works, in order and importance.

That is why Jesus said,

“He who *believes in me* will never be thirsty” (John 6;35).

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who *believes in me* will live, even though he dies; and whoever *believes in me* will never die” (John 11:25-26)

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who *believes in me* should stay in darkness” (John 12:46).

And when some people came to Jesus and “asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: *to believe in the one he has sent*’” (John 6:28-29).

Jesus always described being a Christian in terms of faith. In our reading Paul points out the fundamental problem of looking at laws as the way to be saved before God. [Now, it is worth pointing out that the Old Testament system did not rest on law keeping, but on the concept of sacrifice for sin. But that is too much meat to bite off in this sermon.] Paul’s point is that people liked to point, not to all the *sacrifices* spoken through Moses which spoke of God’s grace, but all the *rules* spoken through Moses which spoke of human obedience.

That veil represented a law-based peace treaty between God and us—***“in Christ is it taken away”*** (14).

**II. Seeing the True Glory of the Savior**

The true glory of God is only seen in Jesus.

Do you remember the OT reading? When Moses came down the mountain after talking with God, his face was glowing. The Israelites were afraid of him. They ran away. Like dragging a frightened cat out from under the bed, Moses had to go after them. If Jesus’ message is even more glorious than Moses’, how can we look at Jesus?

But maybe part of the answer is that when we come to know Jesus, we are changed. One Christian author loved to write about God’s kingdom in his works of fiction (C.S. Lewis: *Chronicles of Narnia; The Great Divorce*). The way he liked to portray God’s kingdom is that it is *more real* than the created world. For example, he pictured the grass of God’s kingdom as unbelievably green and luxuriant, but also hard as diamonds—sharp enough to cut the feet of someone who doesn’t belong there. But that was only half of his picture. The other half of his picture is that when someone comes to faith, they also become more real. And now they can walk on that more real grass of God’s kingdom. Of course he was writing fiction, but he’s trying to help us realize that in Christ there is a new glorious life, and that life is more like the life God gave to Adam and Eve in the beginning, and what he will fully give us when we leave this world to be with him for eternity. Looking straight at the Son of God, our Savior, ***“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”*** (16).

**III. Reflecting the Son Whom We See**

As we look at the glory of God’s one and only Son, we are changed. We start (now mind you, only start) to reflect the glory that Jesus shone with on that Mount of Transfiguration. Like Jesus, we are transfigured. Consider again Paul’s words, ***“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.”*** In the last verse of our reading he explains what that looks like. ***“We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.”***

The hallmark of a Christian is integrity. Because we want to thank our God, we leave behind secret and shameful ways. We are not hypocrites who say one thing in God’s house, but live another in the world or in our private lives.

But what if… what if I look at my life and though I have tried to not waste my time, my employer’s time, my family’s time that they have a right to expect from me, but I still spend too much time in front of the TV, the device, on my own pursuits? What if I still am not as loving and patient as I ought to be? What if I take God’s name in vain and don’t give much to him, either of time or money? What then?

We go back to our Savior again, confessing our sins. And he forgives. And we also sometimes need to go back to people too, and ask their forgiveness. But know this, that *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 8:1). Then, knowing that, that we are right before God, we can joyfully live for him, not living in the shadow of what we have done, but living for the light before us. Our eyes staring straight at the Son.

That is where we have to understand that our transfiguration is different from that of Jesus. In Jesus it was a statement of who he is, always was and always will be. He is perfectly glorious. But ***“we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.”*** While we are daily becoming more Christ-like, trusting in Jesus, we live under a sky of God’s forgiveness for the wrongs we commit every day. Here is where we must be careful. It is not that we are gradually achieving the right to get into heaven. We have been given heaven, not as a right, but as a gift. But our own lives gradually match Jesus’, more and more. Or to use church language, our justification (being saved) is complete, but our sanctification (lives as saved Christians) is a work in progress.

Indeed, I hope that each and every one of us can in some way look at our lives and realize this happening. Not perfect, but ***“being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.”*** And if this is a bit frustrating, do not disheartened by it. This has ever been the lament of true Christians, who understood what Jesus did for them.

Many years ago there was a man who lived a terrible life. Every one of us would be disgusted by him. He, John Newton, heard of God’s undeserved love in Jesus and one day finally became a Christian. So he wrote that well-known hymn, “Amazing Grace.” Before I say more, let me just put in a plug for the new Bible Class series starting next Sunday. We will be looking at the stories behind five great hymns like “Amazing Grace.” And I think you will be amazed.

But what did that author have to say about himself? He had left his life of depravity behind. But as the years went by, he realized that he had not left all sin behind. He said this: “Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’” *(*[*https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John\_Newton*](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Newton)*, accessed February 5, 2016)*. He realized the truth of our reading: ***“We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.”***

Let that be our joy. That we can look straight at the Son, the Son of God. And that even while our sinful flesh still clings to us, he still transforms us more and more into his likeness, until one day we will enjoy eternity with him. Amen.