**2 Corinthians 4:3-6** February 11, 2018

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

 *2 Corinthians 4:3If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. 6For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Right There in Plain Sight**

 In warmer climates, like southern Florida or Brazil, there is a tree called the flamboyant tree. Just before the summer rains, this tree bursts into brilliant red-orange blossoms. The flowers cover every inch of every branch of the tree. And they are big spreading trees, not like the narrow profile trees of ice-prone Kentucky.

 There was a boy who lived in one of those parts of the world. He would hear people make a fuss about the beautiful flamboyants, year after year. He could never understand what all the fuss was about. To him, the flowers looked so ordinary and unimpressive. >He was color-blind. To him, the bright red-orange flowers looked almost exactly the same color as the leaves. A spectacular display of God’s creation was right in front of him, but he couldn’t see it. He was blinded to what was **Right There In Plain Sight**.

**I. A Gospel that People Don’t See**

 Our reading starts out with something like that. The Apostle Paul said, ***“Our gospel is veiled…”*** to some. It had been spoken, to be sure. But the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, was obscured, hidden, covered. Paul said he could put right out there in plain sight, but people couldn’t see the picture he was painting.

 Now notice, the apostle Paul is talking about the Gospel! Elsewhere he describes the Gospel as *“the power of God”* able to *“demolish the strongholds”* of Satan. But here he says that this great, mighty, life-giving good news (that’s what Gospel means: good news), is hidden by something as flimsy as a veil. Why is that? If the Gospel is so powerful, so beautiful, so life-changing, why don’t more people recognize it for what it is?

 This was a problem for the people who received this letter. Many people among the Christians in Corinth had questions about Paul. They had questions because outsiders had come into their midst and were proposing more pragmatic and powerful philosophies than the Christ-centered message Paul had preached. These infiltrators said that Paul didn’t look impressive. His message was not flashy enough. He was too restrictive of personal freedom. They had more impressive messages, ways that yielded better results and offered more freedom.

 The question might have come up in their midst: If Paul’s message is really God’s message, then why doesn’t it work better, convince more? What these guys are doing seems to work better. If the Gospel is straight from God, then why doesn’t it work like it’s straight from God?

 It is a question every person who has ever been involved in evangelism work asks. You knock on doors, and 95% of people, or more, plainly feel they have far better things to do on a nice afternoon than think about God. You visit guests who have actually come to our church and worshiped with us, but you can see that they weren’t impressed, or maybe they were even outright offended. And you *know* that everyone around here was trying to be as nice and friendly as possible. And you just think in your mind, “I wish you would give us another chance. I think you must have misunderstood something. Did you hear the part about Jesus?” But they never return. And the question comes up, “Maybe the problem is with the message. If it really is the word of God, shouldn’t it work a little better than that?”

 So many reject the gospel! It is more than a shame, it is a tragedy! We know that the “gospel” is not just a good story that makes you feel good. It isn’t simply “good news” like “You won a $50 door prize.” The good news that Jesus is our Savior from all our faults and failings before God revolutionizes life. It changes who you are, what you expect out of life, how you treat people, and everything else, for the better. We wish more people knew and believed this good news!

 Instead, we struggle to make ends meet. One new person here, one there. Meanwhile, others pass away, move away or just drift away. Why doesn’t the Gospel work better?

 Briefly, it must be admitted that sometimes we are the problem. Sometimes we are a little off-putting. Sometimes we don’t do the work. And that is a valid discussion for another time and place. But that really isn’t the core problem.

**II. The One Who Blinds**

 The core problem is this: ***“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers.”*** The apparent failure of the Gospel is the work of “the god of this age,” the devil. The devil is a god with a little “g”. But unlike those ancient Greek, Roman or pagan gods, the devil is real. He exists, and does have power in the lives of those who will listen to him. Yet remember, the devil is a god with a little “g”. He created nothing. He can do nothing unless God allows it to happen. And when this age comes to an end at the Second Coming of Jesus, he will be cast into the lake of fire with all who follow him (Revelation 20:10,15).

 From the beginning, the god of this age has blinded the minds of people. He has striven to put a veil between humanity and God. Isn’t there that phrase, “to throw shade”? (Sorry, kids, to embarrass you.) But it’s a great picture of what the devil has done from the beginning. In speaking with Eve, he casually darkened the light that God had revealed. God had clearly set his will before Adam and Eve, but Satan darkened God’s guidance with promises of freedom: freedom from God’s rule, freedom to experience all the illicit pleasures that the true God had forbidden them.

 Does that sound like anything you hear in songs? See on TV? Are taught in the classroom? See posted or shared on Instagram? The devil’s power was exerted not just in Eden, but to this present day. He is ***“the god of this* present *age.”*** Anything and everything that would veil the gospel of Jesus Christ, *that* is the devil trying to blind people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the devil trying to put a veil, a curtain of separation between God and people. And when he does, ***“[The gospel] is veiled—to those who are perishing.”*** Those who reject the gospel, will perish. Those who are perishing reject the gospel.

 It really is that serious, that black and white. Many, or maybe I should say, all of us would prefer to not have to take faith that seriously. We too fall into the sins of trying to offend no one and soft-selling Law and Gospel. We would prefer that surely nice people must be godly people—even though they have no interest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

 And so we downplay the importance of the Gospel. The god of this age partially blinds even us as to what really brings people close to God. He loves to confuse, and one lie will do as well as another. The devil is the god of this world and he has dozens, hundreds, thousands of philosophies with the same destination: hell. God forgive us for not taking faith seriously! It really is an either/or proposition with the Gospel.

 It isn’t Lutherans who promote an exclusivist way of salvation. It isn’t even “the Bible” (though it is the Bible), but it is Jesus himself who tells us this. Jesus himself says it really is such a black-and-white manner. He says, *“He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God”* (John 8:47). If you don’t like what the Bible says, then it means you are not God’s! Jesus says, *“Whoever believes in [the Son] shall not perish but have eternal life…but whoever does not believe stands condemned already”* (3:16,18). And so our reading tells us, ***“[The gospel] is veiled to those who are perishing.”*** If people don’t accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, then they have the destination of hell printed on their ticket.

 That wakens us to an imperative. We cannot be indifferent to people in these circumstances. Can we pass by a stranger dangling over a cliff and say, “Who cares?” Can we let a person drink from a poisoned well? Maybe you can. Maybe you can be content in the knowledge and faith God has given you, and you can say, “At least I got saved. Who cares about the rest?” But I don’t think that is really what you think, because when you have known Christ, you want others to know Christ.

**III. Right in Plain Sight: God Makes Us See It**

 The apostle Paul could not take a calloused attitude, not even with the people who caused him the most trouble. He looked at his own life and marveled, ***“God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts.”*** Paul could never, never, never be a proud Christian, looking down his nose at the people who rejected the gospel. He could never look at the lost and just consider them collateral damage, because he knew how he got where he was.

 He compared his own faith in the Gospel to the wonder of creation itself. ***“God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts.”*** Maybe you saw it this week on Thursday. After the ice storm, it stayed so cold that when Thursday’s sun came, you were treated to a rare spectacle. Did you see it? I looked up at a towering oak tree, maybe 80 feet tall, and it looked like an eighty foot tree of glass; thousands of little points of light reflected at me. That beauty, that radiance, is what happened inside each of us when God caused the light of faith to shine in us. Now we have ***“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”***

 Even if the gospel was in plain sight, it was God who made that light shine in our hearts, because we cannot know and believe in Christ, except that God gives us sight.

 On Transfiguration Sunday, one is tempted to compare Jesus’ Transfiguration with us being given the light of the Gospel. There is a really, really important difference. When Jesus was transfigured, he was merely shown to be what he was. Nothing new was given to him on that mountaintop. In the Transfiguration his disciples learned a truth that was hidden from them, but had always been there right in plain sight. It is a little like a super hero putting on his superhero suit. Barry Allen is the Flash whether he has his suit on or not. Most people just don’t realize it. But when Barry Allen puts on the suit, people say, “There’s the Flash!” Transfiguration was when Jesus revealed who he really always was: the Son of God.

 On the other hand, when God causes the light of the gospel to shine in our hearts, we become something that we were not. We are *not* Transfigured. We are transformed, we are completely changed. When God shone the light of faith into our hearts, we become something we were not. We confess this in the meaning of the second article of the Apostles’ Creed: “Jesus redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature.” The Bible says it too. A chapter after our reading, God’s word says, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (5:17). With faith, we become something we were not. Don’t you wish everyone had that gift?

 Whenever the gospel is spoken, the power to save is in plain sight. May God frustrate the devil’s efforts to veil it. May God give you the boldness to speak it. And may he let its light shine in the hearts of people who hear it. Amen.