As Christians, sometimes we misuse God's law and it keeps us from seeing our Savior. Sunday's sermon teaches us how God removed the veil and shows us Jesus' glory!

Transfiguration Sunday – Year C – February 10, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY
Based on 2Corinthians 3:12-4:2 written by Pastor Paul Horn

The Covenant is Revealed through Christ
I. The Old Covenant through Moses was temporary
II. The New Covenant through Jesus transforms

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.
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.

Looking for a way to transform your life? I know it’s been six weeks since New Year’s, statistically when resolutions are broken. It’s the middle of winter. Spring is just around the corner, and you’re dragging. You need a pick-me-up. Well, all you have to do is follow my easy seven step program. After you learn these seven steps, your life will be transformed, and so will the lives of your spouse, your children and even your church!

Have you heard that before? Think something like this lasts long? Do you want something to transform your life, something that will last? God promises you that he will change your life. It does not happen by following a seven step program. It doesn’t happen by following his laws and regulations, but through a promise, the covenant he made with you, a covenant he kept in Christ.

Lesson this morning from the Apostle Paul’s second letter to Corinthians, the Holy Spirit teaches us: The Covenant through Christ is Revealed: the old covenant through Moses was temporary; the new covenant through Christ transforms.

You may recall that when the LORD revealed the Ten Commandments to his people, he did so through Moses. Moses climbed Mount Sinai, spoke with the LORD, he came down from the mountain, and the people of Israel ran away. They were scared of him. Moses’ face was radiant. It shone with the brilliance of being in the presence of the LORD God. So Moses had to wear a veil over his face. Not like a bride’s veil, but more like a scarf wrapped around the face. He had to hide the glory. That glory represented the covenant God gave to his people. But that glory would not last, just as the glory faded from Moses’ face, so, too, the glory would fade from the old covenant. It was temporary and inadequate. This is why:

The old covenant, the Ten Commandments, would not bring an individual closer to God. In fact, if you hold up your life side-by-side with the commandments it would show that you have not kept those commandments. The commandments show your sin and how great your sin is. If I think that I really haven’t done anything really bad… Galatians 3:10 tells me, “Whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it.” Secondly, if I think that my breaking the law isn’t that big of a deal Paul says, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

However, the law is not bad. God gave us his law. It is good. The purpose of the law is to show people their inability to pull themselves up to God by their own bootstraps. This is the issue the Jews had with the law. In our lesson, “Whenever the law is read a veil is over their hearts.” Paul was thinking about a synagogue service, when a portion of Moses’ law was read, the people failed to see it as temporary. They saw God’s law as his final word to them. And so they thought that they could earn God’s favor by obeying the law. The law was a veil that covered their face. Because they rejected Christ as one who fulfilled the law. They rejected Jesus as their Savior from condemnation and death, and instead looked to themselves as their own Savior. They failed to see the purpose of the law.

I think that even as Christians there are times we fail to have a proper understanding of God’s commandments, and how we use them in our lives.

One of the ways we misuse the law is that sometimes we keep the veil over our eyes. Just like the Jews we see God’s law, and that’s it. We realize we have failed to live our lives as God commands, and we despair of our sins, but then we forget to look to the cross and see our Savior. Instead, we continue to stare at the law and beat ourselves up spiritually and emotionally. We get depressed because we feel that there is no way God could accept us because we’ve been so sinful.

Or we jump to the other extreme and just completely ignore God’s law and make our own laws. For example: God commands us to forgive each other. If we have a grievance against someone, he expects that we go and speak to the individual in love, in the hope of reconciling. But we don’t do that. Instead we justify our grudge and our unwillingness to forgive and complain about it to others. We’ve ignored God’s law to love and forgive and made our own law.

Or we use the law to make ourselves feel better. We think, “If I just keep these commandments as best I can, then I’ll feel better about my relationship with God. At least I’m trying to do some of the things he wants me to.” But that life is like being set on a treadmill that never wears out. You keep running and running and never get anywhere. Eventually you collapse and die. Using the law to get right with God only leads to death.

Another way we misuse God’s law is that we think God’s law is the way to motivate people to proper Christian living. As parents, we set rules for our children in the home. It is good to set limits. When a child breaks those rules, it gives parents an opportunity to teach the child that there are consequences for poor choices. We use God’s law to point out the child’s fault - how they have sinned against you and God. The child repents and says, “I’m sorry.” So far so good. But then, too often, we miss an important step. Instead of forgiving them and reminding them that God loves them, we fire back, “Are you sure you’re sorry? Have you learned your lesson?” And we bring it up again and again, “I can’t believe you did that! You better not do it again!” Instead of running them to see their Savior as the solution for their sin, we continue to drag our children back to the law, and point out their sin. Has any child ever changed their poor behavior by having, “Honor your father and mother,” chanted into their ear day after day?

We do the same thing with spouse and friends. Days, weeks, months, sometimes years later, an offense is brought up in conversation and thrown back into the individual’s face. We use the law to point out their sin again and again, and think that will somehow reminding them of their poor choices will change their behavior.

When we misuse God’s law, it’s like holding a precious, beautiful antique vase. Be careful now, don’t drop it! But we become distracted, and it slips out of our hands and shatters on the floor. Not only have we broken God’s law and sinned, but when we misuse God’s law, we shatter the lives of others, and we shatter our own life. When we misuse the law, we rob ourselves and others of gazing at the glory of Christ and all he has done for them.

That is why the Old Covenant was temporary, why its glory was fading, why it was inadequate, and still is. The law does not transform my heart. It does not change my behavior. It does not comfort me. It does not point me to my Savior. It only points out my sins and makes me realize I ought to die for my sins. Which is good. Then I realize that I cannot pull myself up to God. That’s where the New Covenant comes in.

In vs16 Paul wrote, “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away.” Don’t misunderstand… turning to God is not something I can do. By nature my heart is sinful. And it is dead spiritually. I am unable to turn to God. Just as a blind man cannot make himself see again. God must lift the veil from our hearts so that we can see our Lord. In Vs17-18 Paul explains, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit is there is freedom.” The Holy Spirit is wherever his Word and Sacraments are used. When the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, when Holy Baptism is administered, there the Holy Spirit works to remove the veil from our hearts so that we may gaze at the glory of Christ. That is why Paul said in vs14, “…only in Christ is the veil taken away.” Once the Spirit lifts that veil, and I look past the law, I see Jesus and he comforts me. He gives me life, because he is the solution to my failure to obey God’s commandments.

Jesus is the glory of the new covenant. We see that Jesus did what we could not, cannot do: fulfill God’s demands of the Ten Commandments. We talked about holding grudges and withholding forgiveness… think about how many people sinned against Jesus during his ministry, and how many people offended his Father. I think of the sinful promiscuous woman Jesus met at Jacob’s well, his disciples who abandoned him in the garden, Peter who denied him in the courtyard. Jesus used the law of God point out their sin. They repented. And did Jesus throw it back in their faces? No. Instead he pointed them to his perfect life and said, “There… there you find forgiveness. In my life of obedience you find what God demanded from you.” In Jesus we see God’s law met fully and completely. This is why the glory of the old covenant is temporary. It does not lead me to see Jesus. But the new covenant, the new promise, points me to Jesus.

When I gaze at Jesus I begin to see clearly why the old covenant given on Mount Sinai is temporary and fading. The law given on Sinai said to sinners, “You must die, for you have sinned!” God the Father takes me by the hand and pulls me up to Golgotha and says to you and to me, “Look! Jesus died that death for you, the death you deserved. His death was full, sufficient, satisfactory and complete - a death that gives life, and changes your life.”

At the beginning of the sermon I talked about life transformation. We could talk about seven-step plans, but oftentimes a single event can majorly change your life: a death, a birth, a marriage proposal, a job offer and a move. My friends, one single event changed your lives forever: your baptism. For it is in holy baptism that the Holy Spirit removed the veil from your eyes, so you can now clearly see all that Jesus has done for you. This is a life-changing event! As Paul said, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (vs17) You have the freedom from the uncertainty of wondering, “Am I forgiven?” Through the new covenant in Christ you are. Freedom from the uncertainty of wondering, “Have I done enough?” Through the new covenant in Christ, he has done enough for you. Freedom from the uncertainty of wondering, “Will I go to heaven?” Through the new covenant in Christ, God the Father says, to you, “You will be in heaven.”

That’s life-changing news! Paul says, “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.” (vs18) When we gaze at the glory of Jesus meeting God’s demand of a perfect obedience to the commandments, when we gaze on Christ as he dies the death for sinners, we, through faith in Jesus, become Christ-like in the way that we live. This is what motivates Christian living, not the law, but the gospel - the good news of Jesus transforms my heart, which is reflected in my attitudes and speech and actions. When I understand God’s gift to me in Christ, that leads me and others to right living. When I understand God’s gift in Christ, then I understand the right and proper use of the law as a parent, spouse, Christian friend – I use the law to point out sin, to condemn sin, to put to death, so that they see their need for a Savior. Then I can pull back the veil and show them the glory of Christ - glory that transforms lives.

I recently spoke with a friend who watches The Biggest Loser. If you’re unfamiliar with the show, overweight contestants join a program in hopes to become the biggest loser of weight and body fat and win the prize money. I said to my friend, “No offense, and don’t take this the wrong way, but you don’t need to lose weight. Why do you watch the show?” They replied, “Because these people motivate me with all their hard work, their striving to reach their goal, and it helps me stick with the program I’m on, to keep healthy and exercise and eat right.” I’m sure that this show will air the next six weeks. But you know, over the next six weeks we have an opportunity to watch someone strive with all their might, to struggle against temptation, to carry a heavy burden, to strive for perfection, and (spoiler alert) he wins. In our Sunday morning services during Lent we will watch Jesus actively obey the law. In our Wednesday evening Lent services we will watch Jesus passively suffer for our sins and die. When we behold Jesus, and all the work he did for us, that, my friends, transforms lives. Won’t you join us these next six weeks on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings to see the glory of the new covenant, a covenant that transforms? Amen.