

THE VEILED GLORY WE POSSESS AS GOD'S CHILDREN

Sermon for the Transfiguration, 2021

Exodus 34:29-35

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before, Exodus 34:29-35: ²⁹ **Moses came down from Mount Sinai. The two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hands when he came down the mountain. Moses did not know that the skin of his face was radiant because God had been speaking with him.** ³⁰ **When Aaron and all the other Israelites looked at Moses, they saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.** ³¹ **However, when Moses called to them, Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him and Moses spoke to them.** ³² **After that, all the other Israelites came near him and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had told him on Mount Sinai.** ³³ **When Moses had finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face.** ³⁴ **However, whenever Moses entered the presence of the LORD to speak with Him, he used to remove the veil until he came out. Whenever he came out he used to tell the Israelites what he had been commanded.** ³⁵ **When the Israelites saw Moses' face, they observed that the skin on Moses' face was shining. Then Moses used to put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text this morning is such a good transfiguration kind of Old Testament Lesson because here we see the glory of God shining from the face of the man Moses. We could call it a "borrowed glory," but *it is the glory of God*. In the Transfiguration of Jesus, we see the glory of God shining forth from God through the veil of the humanity of Jesus. Moses commanded the Israelites **"to do everything that the LORD had told him on Mount Sinai.** ³³ **When Moses had finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face.** ³⁴ **However, whenever Moses entered the presence of the LORD to speak with Him, he used to remove the veil until he came out."** Unlike Moses, however, Jesus did not put on His veil and take it off from time to time. The mystery of Jesus Christ is that He put on the veil of human nature and human flesh and blood at His conception and has never taken it off. When He ascended back into heaven, He did not leave His body behind.¹ At the time of the Transfiguration, Jesus allowed the glory that was His own to shine through the veil, but He has never taken it off. Today, the glory of God permeates and shines through the humanity of Jesus *full-time*. His time of humility and meekness has now passed. He is true God and always has been. Now, all the glory and power and might and every attribute of His divine nature are at work full time even in and through His human nature!

What does that mean for us? It means that wherever we find God or imagine Him to be, the man Jesus must be there. You cannot have God without Jesus. That is what Jesus meant when He once said, *"For the Father does not even judge anyone but has given all the judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who has sent Him"* (John 5:22-23). The Father and the Son share equal honour.

That is the problem with Judaism, Islam, and all of those other religions. Often you hear them speaking of God as if they worship the same God as we do. But they do not accept Jesus as God, and so, when they use the word, "God," they mean something fundamentally and radically different than we do. When they pray, they pray either to a creature of their own vain imaginings, or they pray to a demon - but where God truly is, there you will always find - and always certainly have - and surely always pray to Jesus. We are not saying that you cannot pray to the Father, or to the Holy Spirit for that matter, but we are saying that you cannot pray to the Father *if Jesus is not true God in your faith*, and if you imagine that you can pray to the Father without Jesus also listening in.

The light shining from the face of Moses said something. **"When Aaron and all the other Israelites looked at Moses, they saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him."** Even a reflection of the divine glory was too much for sinful people to bear. This is beyond all human experience. It spooked Aaron and the company of Israel because it was that visible, undeniable proclamation that they were dealing with the true God! It was a reflection of the divine glory because earlier, Moses had said to the LORD, *"Please, show me Your glory!"* The LORD answered, *"I shall make all My goodness pass in front of you and shall proclaim My name, 'the LORD' in your presence. I shall be gracious to anyone to whom I am gracious. I shall have compassion on anyone on whom I have compassion."* ²⁰ *However, He said, "You cannot see My face, because no human being may see Me and live."* ²¹ *The LORD also said: "Look! Here is a place near Me. Stand on the rock!"* ²² *When My glory goes past, I shall put you in a gap in the rock and shall cover you with My hand until I have gone past.* ²³ *Then I shall take My hand away, and you will see My back.*

¹ Luke 24:51

Nevertheless, My face will not be seen" (Exodus 33:18-23).

This glow was the evidence that Moses was indeed standing in the presence of the LORD! One lost the ability to pretend that God was distant, off, out there somewhere, or that other deities were "*just like Yahweh,*" or that they were surely as legitimate and valid as He. Yahweh had sent the plagues. He had made the Red Sea part and stand like the walls of a hallway for Israel. He had made manna appear to feed them every morning - except, of course, on the Sabbath. He was the cause of the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, and now, "**the skin of (Moses') face was radiant because God had been speaking with him.**" Yahweh's glory was luminescing from the face of His prophet, Moses. There was no confusion possible here. Unbelief could possibly be done - and it was from time to time - but there was no room for confusion. This is the true God!

St. Paul also uses the veil of Moses to describe the stubborn unbelief of Israel, and the natural condition of all other unbelievers, who read the Word of God and do not find Jesus, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind therein. In 2 Corinthians 3:15, Paul says that when they read the Old Covenant, "*a veil lies over their hearts*" - they cannot see the glory of God in Christ. Paul was picturing a typical synagogue service of his day, which would always include a public reading of some part of the Law of Moses. Sad to say, the Jews of his day looked upon the Law in the same way as the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai. They viewed it as God's final word. They failed to see its temporary, and therefore inadequate, character. A veil had obscured their proper spiritual vision because they had rejected Christ, and "*only in Christ is [the veil] done away with*" (2 Cor. 3:14). In their distorted spiritual vision, with a veil over their hearts, the Jews saw the Law as the *cure-all and end-all.* They did not put their faith in the Christ promised them in their Scriptures and, consequently, not in the Christ who had come as promised and who by his life and death had become "*the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" (Romans 10:4).

Anyone who is not afraid to speak out about their faith in their daily dealings with people realises that this veil is not just over the hearts of Jews but over all who have not yet been enlightened by the Gospel. It is the natural inclination of all people to view their hope of getting right with God through this veil that makes them see the Law way as the way to a right standing with God. It takes the powerful working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to tear away this veil so they can see the real truth as it is found in Jesus only. When people are brought to faith, Christ lifts the veil, and they can see the glory of God.

And what is the glory of God? The answer to that question is the same as the answer to "What is the will of God for us?" This is the glory that Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 4:6 when he says, "*For it is God, who said, "Let light shine out of the darkness."*" This is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Paul thinks back to what the Lord had done for him. At the time of creation, God had said, "*Let light shine out of the darkness.*" That same God had removed the veil from Paul's heart and brought light to it. He defines that light as knowing, that is, personally experiencing "*the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.*"

The glory of God is that He has sent His Son to become one of us, to live for us and then die in our place so that our sins are forgiven, *and we are made heirs of everlasting life.*

Jesus has accomplished all that He had come to do. Our sins have been atoned for. We have been redeemed. Our sins are forgiven, and God pours out everlasting life upon all that the one that believes might receive and possess and enjoy that life beyond sin and sickness, sorrow and death. "*He who has come to faith and been baptised will be saved*" Jesus says (Mark 16:16).

The glory which shone from the face of Moses, like the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, also speaks to us about the promise of God for us. That glory of Moses is just a pale foretaste of what God has planned for us. God has promised to transform us into the **image** of His glory. We have that glory now, but like Moses, we have it hidden behind a veil. God would have us walk by faith, not by sight. It would be an interesting world if Christians glowed, while unbelievers did not - but surely the world would find some sort of scientific explanation, and threaten that this "glowing" will damage our health or cause our life-span to be abbreviated, and people would run in fear from us, fearing contagion. And, of course, hypocrites would find it harder to hide in the church.

No, the glory of God in the children of God is hidden. The only way God will let us show it right now is by lives of faithfulness and holiness - loving one another, and serving our neighbour for the sake of Christ. Remember the words of Paul who wrote, "*Therefore, whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do everything to glorify God!*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Our visible glory, when we are finally transformed into the image of His glory, will come on that great day of resurrection and home-going. On that day, our Lord Jesus "*will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself*" (Philippians 3:21), or, as John writes, in his first Epistle, "*Dearly loved people, we are now the children of God, but it has not yet been shown what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:2).

So, like Moses, let us remove the veil whenever we come before the Lord when we enter into His presence in the Word, and in the fellowship of the body of Christ, and in the blessed Sacrament. Let us behold His glory in Jesus Christ - a glory that is veiled to unbelievers, pagans, and hypocrites. And when we leave this place, let us reflect that glory by lives transformed by the Word, shining with the glory of God's love and grace toward us.

Finally, remember Moses and Jesus. The path for Moses was not smooth and easy - he faced the unbelief and hostility of many. He finally died being given just the view of the Promised Land, but not allowed to enter it.² Jesus walked down the Mount of Transfiguration and walked the road to Jerusalem to suffer and to die.³ Just because we carry the glory of God within ourselves does not mean we shall enjoy peace and prosperity and comfort in this world. It means, in fact, just the opposite. We know the attacks of Satan and the hostility of the world. We shall bear the cross, if we are truly Christ's people, for the Father disciplines those whom He loves⁴, and the world hates us as it does Christ, for we are His people and His body in this dark and sinful age. The cross is our witness to the world, and our personal challenge to live out the faith that we confess.

We want to keep in mind that any glory we possess as God's children is veiled. Everyone would want some if it made us rich and happy and kept trouble at bay - but they would want the wrong things and desire God's presence for the wrong reason. We see that misplaced focus in those giant auditoriums with false preachers where people gather and hear that God wants all of His children to be wealthy and happy and triumphant in the ways that our flesh would appreciate. But God wants faith, not greed, lust, and the selfishness of the flesh to be our connection. He has appointed faith as the hand that receives His blessing. So we walk by faith, not measuring our relationship with our Lord by what we see or how it feels, or what others think of us. Our measure is the Word of God. Our goal is to walk humbly with our God. And our true glory in this life - like that of Jesus, or even the glory which shined from the face of Moses - is veiled glory. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR TRANSFIGURATION

Almighty God, Your ears are always open to the prayers of Your people. Hear now the cries of Your children, as we bring before You our needs of body and soul.

Above all else, we praise You for the precious gift of Your Son. Today in particular we bless You for the message of His transfiguration. Through this mighty sign give to us and all people a clearer vision and a higher knowledge of Christ's person and mission. Give us eyes of faith that see the glory of His deity, and the glory that came through His cross, and lead us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Grant that, as we continue to see the glory of His person in Your Word and Sacrament, we may know and believe in Him as the Light of the world, the Sun of righteousness, and the visible likeness of Your very being. May we continually hear the voice of Jesus Your prophet still today, that our faith may constantly be renewed. Grant that, as Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in glory, each of us may die in faith, share in the power of Christ's resurrection, and be eventually transformed into ever greater glory.

Let Your Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles, live in our poor bodies. Transform our weak, sinful lives so that they shine with goodness, purity, and righteousness. Transform our minds, eyes, judgment, and our whole persons, so that they may reflect the mind of Christ. Take away our sickness, pains, wounds, and hurts. Take away our disappointments, defeats, and despair. Take away our sorrows and grieving. Take away our pride, anger, hatred and fear. Take away our selfishness and envy, our laziness and un-concern for others. Take away all our weaknesses, and turn them by the touch of Jesus into impulses, motives, thoughts, words, and deeds that shine with godliness and new life.

Grant Your blessing to Your church. Especially bless all who belong to the fellowship of this congregation. Be present with all our members and graciously supply what they need. Grant that we, and all who bear the name of Christ, may daily offer to You acceptable spiritual sacrifices of repentance, thanksgiving, and obedience.

Look mercifully on our state and our nation. Deliver us from those who love evil and whose aim is unrighteousness. Grant that the whole world may know Your will, and all nations may know Your salvation.

Have mercy on those among us who are sick, lonely, or depressed. Teach them to look to You for healing, comfort, and stronger hope for the glory to come.

Loving Father, as we trust that You are near to us when we call to You, hear our prayer, and grant all our petitions for Christ's sake. Amen.

² Deuteronomy 34

³ Mark 9:9

⁴ Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. The two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hands when he came down the mountain. Moses did not know that the skin of his face was radiant because God had been speaking with him. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the other Israelites looked at Moses, they saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ However, when Moses called to them, Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him and Moses spoke to them. ³² After that, all the other Israelites came near him and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had told him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ However, whenever Moses entered the presence of the LORD to speak with Him, he used to remove the veil until he came out. Whenever he came out he used to tell the Israelites what he had been commanded. ³⁵ When the Israelites saw Moses' face, they observed that the skin on Moses' face was shining. Then Moses used to put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:1-6

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we speak very frankly. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who used to "put a veil over his face" to keep the Israelites from gazing at the end of the glory while it was fading away. ¹⁴ However, their minds were made dull. For to this day the same veil remains when the Old Testament is being read and is not removed, because only in Christ is it done away with. ¹⁵ Rather, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ However, "whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." ¹⁷ This "Lord" is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ As we all reflect "the glory of the Lord" in our unveiled faces, we are being transformed into the same likeness, from glory to glory, just as it comes from the "Lord," who is the Spirit.

^{4:1} Therefore, since we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we do not become discouraged; ² but we have renounced hidden and shameful ways. We do not live by trickery, nor do we falsify the Word of God. Rather, by making the truth plain, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ If our Good News has been veiled, it has been veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, with the result that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine on them. ⁵ We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as the Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is God, who said, "Let light shine out of the darkness!" who has shone in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9:2-9

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him and led them up onto a high mountain, by themselves and alone. He was transfigured before them, ³ and His clothes became dazzling and very white, whiter than any launderer on earth could bleach them. ⁴ Then Elijah appeared to them together with Moses and they began to talk with Jesus.

⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three Tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah!"

⁶ For he did not know what to say, because they had become very afraid. ⁷ Then a cloud came and overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud: "This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!"

⁸ Suddenly, as they looked around, they did not see anyone with them any longer except Jesus only. ⁹ While they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.