

February 10, 2013 Transfiguration Sunday

The two passages today give one of the clearest "before and after" pictures to be found in all of scripture. In Exodus we'll hear about the 'old way'—a relationship between God and humanity that required a veil to separate them. By contrast, in 2 Corinthians, Paul extols the 'new way' ushered in by Jesus in which we meet God face to face.

Exodus 34: 29-35

There are many ways to approach this passage which takes place as Moses returns from the mountain with the 10 Commandments. Today, we are going to focus on the veil that appears prominently in the story. Do we need to be protected from God? Do we need to hide from God? Listen, as the ancient people wrestled with these questions.

²⁹When Moses came down from Mount Sinai carrying the two Tablets of The Testimony, he didn't know that the skin of his face glowed because he had been speaking with GOD. ³⁰Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, saw his radiant face, and held back, afraid to get close to him.

³¹Moses called out to them. Aaron and the leaders in the community came back and Moses talked with them. ³²Later all the Israelites came up to him and he passed on the commands, everything that GOD had told him on Mount Sinai.

³³When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face, ³⁴but when he went into the presence of GOD to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. When he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵they would see Moses' face, its skin glowing, and then he would again put the veil on his face until he went back in to speak with GOD.

2 Corinthians 3: 12- 4:2

The Corinthians could be troublesome folk to Paul with all their questions and opinions. Some imagined that God used the Law as a shield to keep humanity at a distance. Paul throws this idea out completely arguing that for people of faith, the veil is lifted! Listen closely.

¹²With that kind of hope to excite us, nothing holds us back. ¹³Unlike Moses, we have nothing to hide. Everything is out in the open with us. He wore a veil so the children of Israel wouldn't notice that the glory was fading away— ¹⁴and they *didn't* notice. They didn't notice it then and they don't notice it now, don't notice that there's nothing left behind that veil. ¹⁵Even today when the proclamations of that old, bankrupt government are read out, they can't see through it. Only Christ can get rid of the veil so they can see for themselves that there's nothing there.

¹⁶Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face to face! ¹⁷They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! ¹⁸All of

us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

¹Since God has so generously let us in on what he is doing, we're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. ²We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “Exposed... too much information”

When I look at the shower curtain my mind goes to that fateful scene in the movie Psycho!!

For many of us, the shower curtain was a means of protection and privacy -> so that members of a family with one bathroom could ensure that what needed to be hidden stayed hidden!!

This is Transfiguration Sunday => the Sunday before Lent begins. Root of word = “to change in substance.”

If we look from the encounter of people with Moses in Exodus 34 to Paul's impassioned words to the Corinthian Christians, you witness a transfiguration – not of a physical substance but spiritually, attitudinally.

This veil that is the metaphor at the center of both passages is something that exists to hide, to protect or keep things as they are – to obscure.

When Moses covered his face he might just as well have built a wall of concrete and razor wire.

That veil created something akin to the DMZ (demilitarized zone) that has separated North and South Korea for 60 years => except the veil kept Moses on one side with God and all other people at a controlled distance.

People hid from God -> the law became a way – a kind of checklist – to remind people why they were on the other side of the divide AND why they should be afraid of God – that they would never measure up – that if their sins were exposed they would be ashamed.

People continued to cling to this notion even in the early generations of Christianity and I think, it still rear its head in our time.

- We don't think Jesus' grace readily includes me.
- We don't think we can talk to God directly.
- We hide behind the misconceptions nurtured over years of Sunday school lessons and sermons and imagine that God could not possibly love us if God saw us as we really are.

This is where Paul leaps into the argument – essentially his answer is HOGWASH!!

Paul insists that, in Jesus, God has lifted the veil – we are to approach God face-to-face. We are now let in on who God is and how God operates! (V 3: 15, 4: 1)

Let's look at what the expression means in normal usage:

A veil can be a concealing item of clothing (a bridal veil) or a concealing curtain (as used below) and has come to mean "something that hides or obscures like a veil" (Merriam-Webster online).

When you lift the veil from something or someone, you reveal what is behind it. So figuratively, it means to uncover some private or secret thing.

Historically a bridal veil was part of a ruse by the bride's father to ensure that the betrothal contract was completed and the groom did not back out because of seeing the bride i.e. didn't like how she looked).

I was very firm that I would not wear a veil at my wedding.

Was entering marriage with courage – face-to-face – aware of the risks/potential joy.

Paul wants Christians to see their relationship with God as totally open – nothing hidden – no part of it reserved for a select few.

Is a relationship in which we are invited and encouraged to reveal ourselves – expose ourselves – be vulnerable IN ORDER TO RECEIVE the breadth/depth/wonder of the love of God that is intricate, merciful, full of humour, tinged with grief, sprinkled with shame, anger, remorse.

My concern is that we act more like those Israelites – we still hide behind the veil.

Just like we have trouble talking to our kids and grandkids about the privacy on social media, social boundaries, mixed messages about sexuality. Our go-to place is TO HIDE behind rules/limits i.e. no internet access, no smart phone, no dating before 16 etc.

Instead, perhaps we should take our cue from Paul and try to raise our families relating to one another as God relates to us.

That we raise the veil and speak openly, reveal our fears, admit how much we don't understand this ever-changing world -> speak instead of love, vigilance, respect.

Help all of us to see ourselves as created uniquely and joyfully by God who wants us free, safe and fully alive.

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Christ has removed the veil that conceals God's transformative glory. The veil is a huge obstacle. It is a barrier for those who are reading the old covenant (3: 14) and a hindrance for those who do not believe (4: 3-4). For Paul, Christ's removal of the veil cannot help but be a transformative experience. Seeing the glory of the Lord changes everything. God's glory is exposed, but so are the depths of God's mercy.

In 2 Corinthians 4:1, Paul uses the term therefore, a term that reaches back to what has come before and supports the point that he is about to make. Paul says that he and his co-workers, as recipients of God's mercy, have the ministry to shine in the darkness and "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (4: 8). Paul sees himself as one whose motives have been laid bare in the light of God's glory. How could he do anything other than reflect the marvelous grace that God has granted him?

God's grace is changing him, as he believes it is also changing the Corinthians from glory unto glory. They are being transformed by the glory of the Lord. The Corinthians may not be the perfect image of God's glory, but Paul knows that God has not abandoned them. God's Spirit is at work within him and within this struggling church.