

Being Transformed  
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**2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2**

<sup>12</sup> Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; <sup>16</sup> but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

**Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup> They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

In a campaign season like we are in now, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians fits right in. Paul speaks in absolutes and extremes with the same intense passion he had as Saul persecuting Christians. From what we can tell, some folks came around to Corinth teaching a different message than Paul's telling of the good news, and the Corinthians thought maybe

they were on to something. We cannot know exactly what these others were preaching but it is likely safe to guess that they were placing Moses on the same level as Christ, or higher. With no small tirade, Paul makes his point by shooting down theirs. He says, “Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed,” suggesting a blindness among the Jews who did not believe in Christ, a blindness not unlike his own before he met Christ.

I talk about this this morning because, like other words of Paul’s, these have been used for hateful agendas, or at least disrespectful ones – in this case a theological supersession, which places Christianity as the superior faith over Judaism. I want to make clear that, had Paul been known for gentleness instead, he could have said that Christ brought new meaning to the words of Moses, as the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, are also named in Judaism. Today we are beyond the anti-Semitism this fomented for centuries, and we now can name the value in the holy scriptures of the Jewish people and say that they are part of our scriptures because we understand those stories to be necessary partners in our stories, not because our scriptures are held up against them as better or more complete. (And, to further illuminate Paul’s message, Exodus does not report Moses putting a veil over his head because he didn’t want the people to see the glory of the Lord fading; Exodus 34 actually states, multiple times, he covered his face because it was shining from his encounter with God, which frightened the Israelites.)

So on we go to the heart of Paul’s message, once he’s made clear that in seeing Christ we see most clearly, as he says, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” What he is saying is that, following Jesus’ example puts us on a path of transformation which brings us closer and closer to Christ-like living, even if at times imperceptible. Professor PHEME PERKINS frames our journeys this way: “the goal of all religious practice [is] transformation into the image of God.”<sup>1</sup> This reference to religious practice is a timely reminder as we head into Lent, when **you** might choose a practice on which to focus during Lent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*, p. 451.

You may have seen a commercial for a vaccine against pneumonia which depicts people doing one of a healthy thing – eating one blueberry or one piece of broccoli, doing one push-up or one yoga pose – and asking “wouldn’t it be nice if doing these things once would be enough for a lifetime?” Their vaccine, of course, is needed one-time only. Well, just like the healthy practices for our physical bodies, you know our healthy practices for our spirits, for our faith, are meant to be practiced repeatedly. Just as a musician or an athlete practices to improve, we practice our faith so we might, from degree to degree, improve into the image of God, whom we know in Jesus.

Lest we think that transforming into the image of God means reaching a place where we stop, we have our reading from Luke to teach us more about what it looks like to be in the image of God. Today we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ, in part through the reading of the same. Jesus climbs a mountain to pray and, while there, is transfigured, which marks the beginning of his journey to the cross and then into resurrection, which Luke refers to as that “which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” After he is transformed, transfigured, he goes down the mountain and **acts**, healing and teaching. In his example, with each transformation, each degree, we are summoned to act. To be in the image of God is to be expressing God’s love, to be bringing people closer to God.

We may not heal dying children as Jesus did but we can work to heal rifts and tears in this world, between individuals, between groups, between nations. We may not teach through preaching as Jesus did but we can all teach through our living. And we can all love, as closely as we are able to the way Jesus did and does. Degree by degree we improve as we continue to strive after the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,<sup>2</sup> who is Jesus. Maybe you know which practices help you grow and grow. Maybe you are looking for more or newer ones. If you are looking for some options, you can find devotional books back by the bulletins, both for individuals and for families, and don’t feel like you need to have young kids around to take the one for families if it interests you more.

Both Moses and Jesus, and Elijah as well, were living examples of allowing God to work in their lives. All opened to the moving of the Spirit, and for Moses and Elijah the

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

moving of the Spirit moved them degree by degree to glory in God. When you practice, you are not practicing in order to make yourself better, but to practice letting God make you better. Whatever the practice, so may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: God of glory, to be in your image demands that we **be** in your image – help us, we pray. Amen.