

Let the Light Shine

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NIV)

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For 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 God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

When the three disciples of Peter, James, and John were up on that mountain with Jesus, they saw the appearance of his face change and his clothes become as bright as a flash of lightning. Jesus was transfigured before them. Although they had been very sleepy, probably tired from their trek up the mountain, now they were fully awake. They saw Jesus' glory as God while he was joined by Moses and Elijah. "Master, it is good for us to be here," Peter said (Luke 9:33) It was good to be in the presence of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Do you say, "it is good for us to be here" when you come to Light of the Valley? I know that with what happens in life, the frustrations you face, the difficulties you deal with, the strained relationships, it can be hard to say that it is good to be here. Something may be weighing very heavily upon you and your heart that you just can't seem to shake. Personally, I had this moment last Wednesday night. It had been a hard day, and, admittedly, I was a bit drained before the evening came. Then our choir members came. We talked together, sang together, laughed together. We shared struggles, but we also shared the confidence that God was worth it sticking with through the struggles and that he would see us through. I was rejuvenated and had to tell them, "Thank you." It was good to be here, joined with brothers and sisters in Christ who have the image of God and reflected it to one another. Here, right now, we get to have the sheer joy of having God's glory displayed in the face of Christ for you and for each other, sharing the good news "that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (verse 4)

What is this "image of God"? Some might boil this down to appearance, that the image of God is what he looks like. Others might say that the image of God is something like a personality – creative, intelligent, full of life, vibrant, compassionate, etc. That gets part of the way there. The image of God is true righteousness and holiness. I know righteousness and holiness are really churchy kind of words. Righteousness is being right, morally right, right with God, that this is the correct way to live and have your being. Holiness means that there is nothing wrong at all with you, that you are pure, without sin, absolutely perfect.

The image of God is holiness and righteousness. He is completely right – morally and otherwise. He is also completely without any sin, any imperfection, or any short-coming. That Jesus is this image of God was confirmed at his baptism when God the Father spoke of Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) God the Father confirms this again at Jesus' Transfiguration saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5) Jesus is holy and righteous. He is perfect. He is the image of God because he is God. Jesus is truly God, not a separate god displaying God's image looking like God, but one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is what is revealed on this mountain top with his Transfiguration, with the appearance of his face changing and his clothes becoming as bright as a flash of lightning. This was good to see, to see Christ's face shining with the glory of God, the image of God, proving that he is God.

But this moment was not just given so that we could marvel at the fact that Jesus is God and is the image of God; God gave us this moment to know that when he departed, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31), his mission would be accomplished. He kept the image of God along with his human flesh in order to be our substitute, to be the holiness and righteousness that we are not. With this message, that Jesus being God is God's image for us that covers over us and our sins, this is when God "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (verse 6) Jesus, seeing your holiness and righteousness, your life lived for me, I know where I stand with you. Because of what you did, I know that I will live forever in heaven with you. We bask in that light here, right now. With that light of the good news of God's image shining in our hearts as our perfection, we say with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." (Luke 9:33)

"But if it's so good to be here, pastor, why doesn't everybody in Layton come here? Why are we not bursting at the seams? How come all people don't believe this if it's so good?"

The Apostle Paul had to wrestle with the same thoughts from the believers he was shepherding some 2000 years ago. You can hear the unspoken argument. "Paul, if this gospel of Jesus as God's image to be our holiness and righteousness in our place is true, why

doesn't everyone believe that?" Paul responded here, "Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (verses 3-4)

Some people do not believe this good news because the gospel that Jesus is our holy and righteous substitute as the image of God is hidden from them. People have told them that they have to earn it, earn goodness to get goodness, and, honestly, it makes us feel good when we do good things. Why can't I earn holiness and righteousness by doing a certain amount of good works? Others have told them that God is a fairy tale, a myth meant to make people feel better about things out of their control. This way, you don't have to worry about how much good or bad you do. God is nothing. Do what you feel is best. And so people remain blinded to the light of the gospel with these spiritual blindfolds and are, sadly, perishing.

Other times we retreat from the light and put ourselves in darkness. Do we get caught up in the peripherals? Do we focus on other church-related aspects and keep those at the forefront of our minds instead of letting this light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ shine and be our number one passion? Do we "have a talk" with the parent with the fussy child telling them how they should get their kid to behave in church, thinking only about our personal experience at church instead of what this parent and child need to keep having God's light shine in their hearts? Parents, are you so mortified about what your child says and does that when they make a noise in church you are so embarrassed that you feel that you have to get them out immediately instead of working to keep them in worship to have the light of the gospel shine in their hearts? Did someone do something or say something that was so off-putting that you think twice about coming to church? All of these are temptations to retreat from the light of God's gospel and instead put ourselves in darkness.

So, what do we do so that more people can experience God making his light shine in their hearts as well as our own? A lot of this is through relationships. Through the light of this gospel that displays the glory of Christ, we have been brought together into a family, a church family. We have been connected to Christ and to his body. Regardless of how well you know each other sitting here in church today, you have this wonderful connection through what God has done for you. You all belong to the same God covered by his same image of righteousness and holiness – a message you have heard through God's Word, the same gospel Paul preached in Corinth as is being preached here today. We share this image of God, this image of perfection, as we have been washed and made new through our baptisms. We share this image of God when we gather together, united in the same confessed faith, in the Lord's Supper, receiving Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This is the light that God shines on us, the light we bask in here at church or at home in the Word. It is good to be here in this light!

We are called to let this light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ shine to one another. How can we encourage one another to stay in God's light? Is it a phone call, a letter, an e-mail, a text, a smile, a handshake, a hug? Is it a box of tea and a visit? Is it a conversation that rejoices in seeing Jesus during the good times, during times of great blessings, remembering so many good things that God does for us? Is it a moment of solitude of being with someone through the suffering, through the tough and dark times, taking time to look at Christ's glory all over again to remind us that he is perfect and has covered us with his glorious perfection? Is it asking someone to work on a project at church, to tidy things up that you see need to be tidied around church? Is it joining in service like singing in the choir? These are just some of the ways that we can let God's light shine to each other and bask in his light together.

God has also given us other relationships outside of this gathering of believers. These are people that you are already invested in. You love them. They are your family, your friends, your neighbors. Are any of them still blinded? Is the gospel that displays the glory of Christ and his perfect for us veiled to them, hidden, obscured? Can you show them light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ? Can you show them a perfect God who loved them perfectly, lived for them perfectly, and gives them his perfection so that they are brought out of darkness and into his wonderful light? How will you let that light shine in the lives of others?

Jesus' Transfiguration lasted only a moment on that day. His face and clothes went back to normal, veiling the glory and image of God that Christ is. At the same time, though, Jesus never stopped having the image and glory of God. He veiled it until his death and resurrection. Now, his glory and his image never stops shining. He is the one who breaks through our darkness. Bask in his light, and let his light shine out through you – to each other, to the people you know, and to the people you don't know yet. Shine that light showing people that Jesus is God's image, an image of righteousness and holiness, an image that covers over you. Amen.