

SERMON: Unveiled Faces, Unveiled Minds
TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2

2-27-22

When my Presbyterian mother married my Catholic father, she agreed to raise her children in the Catholic church. I have a few memories of attending the Catholic church until my parents divorced, and my mother rejoined the Presbyterian Church. I think I was six or seven years old.

Instead of going to Mass in the beautiful sanctuary, my mother and my sisters and I often attended the contemporary service in the cafeteria / gymnasium of St. Peter's Catholic School, right next door to the church. The space was dull and cold, with cinder block walls, a tile floor painted with markings for a basketball court, and brown, metal, folding chairs. It did nothing to enhance the mood or the spirit of worship. But my teenage sister Carole had probably refused to go to church at all unless we attended the contemporary service, where we would sing songs like *Blowin' in the Wind* and *If I Had a Hammer*. I think the only time we attended in the sanctuary was when Carole was playing the organ for Mass.

But the other difference about going to Mass in the sanctuary, was that we had to dress up, which included wearing white gloves and a little lace doily on our

heads. My Mom wore a blue, wool hat with black netting that draped down over her eyes. The only time she ever wore that hat was when we went to Mass. But it was the late 1960's, when women and girls were required to wear veils in the Catholic Church.

I never understood the purpose, but I don't remember questioning it either. But when I googled it recently I learned that "The veil is meant to be an *external* sign of a woman's *interior* desire to humble herself before God... Women are symbols of the Church - the Bride of Christ – and the veil is meant to be a visible reminder of the perfect submission of the Church to the loving rule of Christ." So, I guess our church veils were essentially bridal veils.

But the veil that Paul writes about in 2 Corinthians is not at all like a bridal veil.

Instead Paul refers back to Moses, who reflected the glory of God after meeting God on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. You may remember this story, and how Moses' face shone so brightly that he frightened the people. So, he would put a veil over his face to protect them from its dazzling brightness.

I veil my face, too, with my hands, when I'm watching the news or a movie, and they start to show swarms of cockroaches or spiders, rats or snakes. Those creatures scare me, and I don't want to see them.

Of course, the fear that Israelites had upon seeing the brightness of Moses' face, was a different kind of fear. Moses had been in the presence of God up on the mountain. He had experienced the brightness of glory of God, the overwhelming power of God, the absolute and unfettered truth of God.

It's really more truth than we can handle. It's the kind of power that is beyond our control. It is a brightness that illuminates all the things we'd much rather hide. That's why it's so frightening. That's why we automatically put a veil over our eyes. That's why we want to put a wall of protection around us. That's why we harden our hearts. It's too revealing, and too uncomfortable.

As one Biblical scholar explained, this story of Moses having to veil his face “occurs right after the story of the Golden Calf, which describes how the people built an idol to worship while Moses was away receiving the tablets with the commandments (Exodus 32-34). Thus, when Paul says that the people's ‘minds were hardened,’ he is alluding to the way their desire for a god they could fabricate, and

bend to their wishes, had become a kind of hardened *veil* for them, which kept them from hearing what God was saying through Moses (or the Scripture). Only the Messiah could ‘set aside’ this veil. Only in this way could a *new covenant* be written on their hearts, where everyone—from the least to the greatest—would know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Paul was trying to explain this to the church at Corinth - that the minds of the Israelites 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. 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.”

You see, Jesus IS the glory of God. This is revealed in his Transfiguration up on the mountain. As he, along with Peter and James and John, was praying, “the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.” In this event, Jesus is now connected to the Law, given by God through Moses, and he’s connected to the Prophets, sent by God and represented by Elijah.

Now, God has sent Jesus, who doesn't just reflect the light of God. He IS the light of God. Just as Moses and Elijah were departing, "a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

LISTEN. TO. HIM.

The point is that we can only fully understand the law of Moses when we read it in the light of Jesus and interpret it with the knowledge of what Jesus taught, who Jesus was, and how Jesus lived. Back to Paul's letter, "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." When we turn to the Lord, our understanding of scripture is expanded and our perspective on the world is enlightened. And we gain hope. And we are emboldened. And we find freedom.

My friend Amy came for a short visit last weekend, and in the evening we were looking for a movie to watch. An old classic caught my eye. *Inherit the Wind* is a movie from 1960, described as "a very thinly disguised rendition of the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial," surrounding the arrest of a teacher who was teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. I had never seen it, but Amy remembered seeing it as a sixth grader, and she commented that it was life-changing for her. Her family was

attending a Southern Baptist Church at the time, which taught that creation happened exactly as it is described in Genesis. God created the world in six days.

But when Amy heard that closing argument from the defense attorney about the number of hours in a day, it was as if a veil was lifted from her eyes.

The prosecutor had indicated that a prominent bishop and biblical scholar had determined the exact date and hour of the Creation to be the 23rd of October (also Amy's birthday, coincidentally!) 4004 BC, at 9:00 am.

The defense attorney questioned, "Eastern Standard Time or Rocky Mountain Time?" He continued to wonder aloud if that first day was 24 hours long.

"The Bible says it was a day."

"Well, there was no sun until the fourth day, so how do you know how long it was?... Isn't it possible that it could have been 25 hours? There's no way to measure it, no way to tell. Could it have been 25 hours?"

"It's possible."

"Then you interpret that the first day as recorded in the Book of Genesis could have been a day of indeterminate length. It could've been 30 hours, could've been a week, could've been a month, a year, could've been a hundred years, or it could have been 10 million years."

Amy's twelve-year-old mind was unveiled with these words. She saw scripture in a new light. She saw the "glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror and was transformed." What I didn't tell you about Amy before was that we met in seminary, and she has been a Presbyterian minister for nearly as long as I have.

I also think about how Jesus enlightened us about the Ten Commandments when he was asked about the Greatest Commandment. He didn't pick and choose from that list of ten. Instead, he both summarized and expanded the commandments, saying that the greatest was that we should "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength." In fact, the first four commandments have to do with our love for God. Then, Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was like the first, that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. The final six commandments are about our relationships with each other.

We come to church, I hope, not just to have our beliefs affirmed and reinforced, but to learn new things. To unveil and open our minds, allowing the Bible to speak to us in a new way, for our time and place. And in the light of God's glory.

God the Father proclaimed it from the mountaintop: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” With UNVEILED FACES and UNVEILED MINDS may we see the light of Christ shining; may we be enlightened with his truth, and may we reflect all that he is... to the glory of God!

AMEN.