



February 10-11-12, 2024 – Festival of Transfiguration

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 3: 12- 4:2

Sermon Theme: We Can SEE Jesus Everywhere

1. We stare at His glory without fear. 2. We view others through His eyes.

12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Dear Friends of Christ,

For this Transfiguration sermon, please take out the bulletin insert entitled: "Do you see me?" Maybe some of you have already followed the instructions printed at the bottom of the page: *Stare at the four dots in the middle of the black image for 30 seconds. Then look up at the light. You can see Jesus.* So let's all try that right now. (Wait for 30 seconds). If you do this correctly, you should see a face of Jesus floating in front of you (it also happens when you close your eyes). Now this isn't a special vision from God (and don't worry if it didn't work this time). Rather it's an optical illusion and here's the science behind it: when light bounces off the white parts of the picture, it produces a chemical reaction in the retinal cells in the back part of your eyes which sends a message to your brain. But, if you keep on staring, say for 30 seconds, those cells become desensitized – in other words, they get tired out.

I wonder if a similar thing ever happens to our Christian faith. We come to this sanctuary week after week. We hear the same Bible truths over and over again. Is it possible we can ever get tired of looking at Jesus? By the way, this is exactly how Satan wants us to feel. I mean, we keep hearing how our world so desperately needs a Savior, and how the Gospel message can and does change hearts. Yet, just watch ten minutes of the evening news with political polls, pundits, and predictions especially during this upcoming election cycle as our world looks for the next Messiah (spoiler alert ... He already came 2000 years ago). But, in a moment of righteous frustration, we

might cry out: "We're tired of it. We just wish the Almighty God would put an end to it and return in judgment with all His holy angels." But think about it. Some of these souls who don't believe are dear family and friends who would be lost forever, if Christ returned right now. They still need to be reached. I pray you don't get tired out by looking at Jesus. If anything, St. Paul tells us today in his second letter to the Corinthians, the more we stare at Jesus, the more excited we get about what He's already done for us and the more He motivates us to share Him with others. On this final weekend of Epiphany known as the Festival of the Transfiguration, truly, when our focus is on Christ, **We Can SEE Jesus Everywhere**. First, we stare at His glory without fear. And second we can see Jesus everywhere as we view others through His eyes.

I need to give you a heads-up. If you stare at this dark picture of Jesus under a bright light too long, you just might get a headache. And even most grade-school student knows: you're not supposed to stare at the sun or you could go blind. If that's scientific truth about the sun, just think about being the presence of a Holy God. His glory is more intense than 10,000 suns. In our Gospel lesson today, we heard about the original transfiguration of Jesus, how Jesus' clothes changed and became dazzling white. And His face glowed with the brightness of those 10,000 suns. His disciples Peter, James, and John were terrified of looking at Jesus because they knew He was holy and they were not. They were terrified of looking directly at Jesus as He revealed Himself one more time before His sufferings and death his true identity as the Son of God. Yet, in the safety of our sanctuary, in the safety of living 2000 years later, we're not afraid to stare at Jesus' glory, are we?

In the Old Testament, people were terrified by God's glory. And for good reason. Because almost every time God showed His full glory, a wicked person was really going to get it. In our sermon reading, Paul reminds us how Moses had a direct encounter with God. Moses met God face to face for 40 days and 40 nights as he received the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai. And after spending all that time in the presence of God's intense glory, Moses' face had a radioactive glow. He didn't want to scare people, so Moses covered his face with a veil when he came down Mt. Sinai. It was a temporary, but effective solution. Now years later at His Transfiguration, Jesus glowed like the sun, And His disciples hit the dirt. That's because when a Holy God makes an appearance, sinners don't have any other choice. It's a simple truth, God can't stand sin. All sinners can do is beg for mercy.

It was true: God's glory on Moses' face was going to fade after a while. And for the Israelites, that would be a big bummer. Think about it: as Moses' face got dimmer and dimmer, God's presence would seem less certain. It's like a Hollywood actress who is in her 60's, but after plastic surgery looks like she's in her 30s. It's amazing what plastic surgery can do these days. But, sooner or later, even actresses hide from the paparazzi because their physical beauty does fade away. Here's the connection: maybe there are times we don't feel as close to the LORD Jesus, as we did when we first joined the church as a teen or adult. Perhaps over time, our shiny Christian faith has gotten a little tarnished, and it seems through the ups and downs of life, God has

just faded into the background. Don't believe that lie of the devil for one minute. If you ever feel far from God in this life, remember God never moves away from us. Don't move away from Him.

And yet, even if God appeared in all his glory right now, we'd have nothing to fear as His believers. Through faith, we know God won't punish us, though we deserve it. We believe the Bible that God has punished His Son Jesus in our place on another mountain, Mt. Calvary. That's whole point of the Transfiguration. As His first disciples witnessed His bloody crucifixion LATER, Jesus had given them this glimpse of His glory NOW to give them hope, when all hope seemed lost. In our sermon text, Paul takes it to the next level as he compares all the Old Testament laws, what God requires, to the veil of Moses. The more people held on to those Old Testament rules and regulations, the more they lost hope. They lost hope because they couldn't ever meet the perfect requirements of the Law. But, follow St. Paul's logic here, only in Jesus, that veil is gone and so are the requirements. Later this week is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of six weeks of Lent. We will one more time hold on to the hope that Christ has removed the veil of sin that separates us from God. In Lent, we are privileged to see Christ's love in action.

As His believers, we are certain the best is yet to come even when it doesn't look like it. When the disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, I'm sure they felt a little let down. They didn't want to go back to a world that made their lives difficult. Would you? But, even when they suffered, they held on to Jesus. They held on to this vision of His glory. They were reminded Jesus is all-powerful and is always with them. So too when we experience setbacks of this broken life: a cancer diagnosis, a prodigal child, or even just growing old, we need to keep staring at Jesus, and staring at His glory that He is the Son of God. What keeps us from seeing Jesus everywhere? It's not what you think. Success, health, and wealth can veil God's glory by distracting us. And then, when those blessings are finally gone, Satan accuses us: "What have you done to deserve God's love?" It's especially at those moments we need to stare at God's glory both on the Mount of Transfiguration and on Mount Calvary. We need to remember Jesus is all-powerful and is always present with us either keeping harm away from us or making that harm serve our good. We need to see Jesus everywhere. And we look forward to the time when we will see Jesus as he is, in the perfection of heaven.

The optical illusion I started my sermon with doesn't last very long. I don't think you'll see Jesus' face floating in front of you. But, just imagine if the image of Jesus was imprinted in our eyes. We'd see Jesus EVERYWHERE, wouldn't we? We'd see Jesus superimposed in the pained eyes of the sick, in the hurting eyes of the lonely, in the hopeless eyes of the lost. Actually, that's exactly how Jesus wants us to view every single person ... through His eyes and have compassion for them.

It's easy to become discouraged especially when the Christian life isn't all that glorious. And quite honestly God's plan of salvation isn't always on our minds. Most people today are more concerned about improving their homes than avoiding hell.

Even though our world has spiritual tunnel vision, Jesus lifts our eyes to catch a glimpse of His glory. That's what gives us the confidence to do what St. Paul says: to share our faith boldly. That's what happens when you stare at Jesus. And we don't have to use gimmicks or tricks. We simply speak God's truth in love. St. Paul puts it this way in the final words of our sermon text: ***We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*** We care about others because Jesus cares about them too.

Look at the example of those first century Christians. They learned to share their faith because they saw Jesus everywhere. In the same way, as we hear God's Word at home and at church, by receiving the LORD's Supper, we learn to see people through our Savior's eyes. We begin to see Jesus everywhere. And that, my Christians friends, is no illusion. That's a Christian vision that lasts. Amen.