

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany—The Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

2 Corinthians 4:3–6 – And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Gifted to Radiate Christ's Glory

Coming home is such a welcome experience. I love traveling and seeing new people. I love connected and reconnecting with friends and colleagues in ministry. But I love coming home. And there is something unique about seeing the familiar landscape of the Four Corners. There is something about coming in from the air to see mountains and mesas, sweeping landscapes and rugged canyons. You can take it all in from one great view and know you are where you are supposed to be.

These verses from 2 Corinthians chapter Four let us know we are where God wants us to be. God wants us to take in the stunning scenery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God wants us to soak it all in and know we have a God who loves us enough to bring us home in a beautiful and wonderful relationship with our Savior. God wants us to bask in the glory of everything Jesus has done for us. Then God wants us to be at home in this glory, to be so comfortable with this amazing love and forgiveness that we keep our attention on our God throughout our lives. And as we feel more and more at home in God's glory so we actually pull others into this glory so they can join us basking in God's goodness to us. It's really a gift to be where God wants us to be and grow to appreciate what God has given us. We are gifted to radiate Christ's glory in our lives.

There is this secluded spot nestled on top of a ridge in the Rocky Mountains. You have to toil and struggle just to get there. If you pause at just the right spot at just the right time you can witness snow-capped peaks, framed by majestic pines, with the sun reflecting brilliantly. You can try to paint the picture with words, but it impossible to put the true majesty of that sight into words.

Have you ever had that kind of frustration when it comes to expressing your faith? Can't you just picture the disciples Peter, James and John going through that same kind of conflicted excitement and frustration after witnessing Jesus' transfiguration? As they're walking down the mountain they're trying to figure out how to share this momentous event with Andrew and Philip and Nathanael. They practice the words they're going to say: 'We saw Jesus turned completely white!' 'Wow, that's pretty amazing, since he's usually olive-skinned.' 'No, you don't get it. It looked like he clothes had been bleached with some kind

of radioactive detergent.' 'Hey, I should get that stuff. My kid's sandals are too big for his feet and he's always coming home with lots of stains in his tunic.' Peter, James, and John just groan and decide it's pointless to even attempt to explain what they experienced. Maybe that's why Jesus saved them the trouble by telling them not to share what happened with anyone until after he rose from the dead (Mark 9:9).

The Apostle Paul understood this frustration with trying to share glory. He writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3: **"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."** When Paul was sharing the gospel he was getting the same whiny excuse you get from elementary school students the first time you try to explain long-division: "It's too hard!" But Paul doesn't write these words in 2 Corinthians chapter four just to vent his frustrations. He wants us to be realistic that not everyone will be accepting of the gospel message.

From your own life you know what the Apostle Paul is talking about. You have the image etched into your mind from when you were talking to your sister-in-law about the importance of attending church, not just occasionally, but regularly for the spiritual nourishment everyone's soul needs. You remember the eyes rolling back into her head as she pleads you to stop lecturing her. You can't forget the pitying gaze of a co-worker when you tell them you give up your Sunday mornings when you could be sleeping in or sipping coffee in your pajamas or heading out to the baseball fields. You know it is good for you to be here. But explaining the "why" is something you struggle putting into words. You just settle with: 'Well, this is something that's important to me.'

In our first Scripture lesson this morning we heard how the Israelites retreated in fear when they saw God's glory radiating from the face of Moses. Instead of feeling like our message isn't working or being frustrated by a lack of results from sharing the gospel message, we need to understand that sinful aversion to God's holy will is quite natural. It's as normal as the vampire-like shrieks and howls you hear as you let light into the room of a sleeping teenager on a Saturday morning while it's still only 11:30am.

The Apostle Paul explains the unbelieving reaction this way: **"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."** (2 Corinthians 4:4) The problem isn't with the light of the gospel. It's not with the person trying to share the light of the gospel. The problem is blindness.

Christ has actually become a stumbling block to them (1 Corinthians 1:23). If we were responsible for causing someone to believe in Jesus this would be a very frustrating exercise. If we were accountable for lack of growth in our church or less than eager reception of God's word, then this rejection would be all our fault. But if we would take credit for successes and blame for the failures of God's word working in human hearts, it would show a complete misunderstanding of the nature of spiritual blindness. It would also ignore the best tools available for fighting spiritual blindness. It would have been very easy for the Apostle Paul to get caught up in the highs and lows of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. But he shares this reminder about his job as God's

missionary: **“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”** (2 Corinthians 4:5) He wants all other Christians to know our responsibilities and our limitations. We are messengers. We stand as heralds of God’s good news.

That means we don’t offer the world our own solutions to it’s problems. We’re not celebrities who conspicuously appear on late night talk show programs only when they have some project to promote. We’re not here to boost our own image. We proclaim Christ as Lord.

Our entire goal as Christians is to promote the gospel. That’s who we are as God’s people. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: **“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”** (2 Corinthians 4:4) The gospel showcases Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is true God, possessing all the power and glory of God. So Christians step out of the spotlight to reveal the full glory of the gospel message, taking personal feelings and opinions out of our proclamation.

And do you know what happens when we take the pressure off of ourselves and let God do his work? We allow God’s word to label sin as sin even if it isn’t politically correct or popular. We allow God’s biting law to operate with laser-like precision on each sinner’s heart. The law addresses and removing every sinful contamination in every sinner’s heart. God continues his operation by allowing the gospel message to provide soothing and healing to those sin-damaged hearts.

Having a fireplace in your family room can be a great source of warmth, both physical and emotional, during frigid New Mexico winter nights. But any family with small children will make sure the little ones stay a safe distance away from the flames and allow the adults to stoke and adjust the fire.

The same is true of Christ’s glory. His holiness detests and destroys sinfulness. That’s what it’s supposed to do. But at the same time as it burns it also gives light and warmth. Christ’s glory shines brightest when on the cross he suffered and died for each sinner and unbeliever. His glory warms the hearts of sinners to let each of us know his death was for us personally. The Apostle Paul says it this way: **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** (2 Corinthians 4:6)

When you are frustrated in your attempts to share that forgiveness experience, Christ’s glory gives us confidence. When the Apostle Paul tells us: **“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ,”** he’s reminding us that the Lord who could command light to appear in the universe is the one who can create saving faith in the most hopeless, sin-hardened heart (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Instead of using our own ideas or opinions when sharing Christ’s glory with someone and instead of leaving ourselves completely out of it, we can use our own lives as examples. To

the sister-in-law who doesn't see the need for regular use of God's word and sacraments in worship we can share how important God's word is in our lives. Not because we're so much better than most people, but because we're sinful and constantly in danger of losing God's gift of faith. Instead of picking on people who aren't in church, we can share why this is a priority for our weekends. We view God's house as a hospital for the spiritually sick, rather than a museum for the saints. That means me. That means I come here with baggage, sins that are eating away at me from the inside. I come with a heart that is out of whack and in need of God's medicine to hit that darkness deep inside me, blasting away at the little idols and selfish tendencies sinking their hooks into my heart. And I'll need to do it again next week. And the week after that. It means turning toward God's glory rather than running away in shame and fear. Turning to God's glory because it gives the light of the knowledge of Christ in my heart (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Without Christ's forgiving love, we too would be lost, trapped in the darkness of sin and unbelief.

Remembering who we are will help us show willingness to radiate Christ's glory in our lives. Jesus came down that mountain for you. Jesus did everything necessary to spare you from the devastating burning of God's holiness against imperfect people. Jesus achieved ultimate glory by lowering himself to become a servant for you. Jesus died and rose to eliminate every shred of fear of standing before your glorious God. You are accepted by God because of Jesus. You shine with the glory of his holiness. That's the glory of the gospel.

Understanding the true nature Christ's glory and radiating that glory in the our lives is what shows Christians are ready for Lent. It's not just that we have to experience that good before we celebrate the bad or trudge through gloom before we bask in Easter joy. It's the first-hand experience of the sinner to the illuminating glory of our God. The light which lays bare before God every thought and word and action of our sinful soul. It's the light that illumines our hearts to understand the forgiving love of God given at Jesus' death on the cross. It's the gospel light shining out the path on our way to our heavenly home. It's the light of Christ that is in us radiating to the world around us.
Amen.