

The Last Sunday after Epiphany — The Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 26, 2017

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 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. (NIV2011)

"Unmasking the Superhero"

1. Disciples Desire to Reveal Glory

Scan a list of the highest grossing movies of recent years and you will see Superheroes aren't dead. For all the new reality TV shows being pumped out, for all the gritty dramas getting awards, and for all the villainous heroes getting attention on TV, superheroes have definitely made a comeback. Maybe it's because of a changing movie industry. Maybe it's all the technology and cinematic wizardry that can make their superpowers so entertaining. Maybe it's a sign of the world in which we live that people are longing for a good old-fashioned good guy.

You can understand the appeal of superhero movies, because you can relate to their basic premises. Take a pretty average guy or girl. Add some unusual circumstances. Out pops an ordinary-looking person ready to come to the rescue. They keep their true identity under wraps until it is necessary to unveil their true selves and true powers.

Teenagers who aren't the starting point guard on the basketball team or captain of the cheerleading squad want their classmates to see who they really are. Even if it isn't obvious, they want friends to see how special and unique they are. Even if their uniforms and letter jackets don't announce it, they want other students to understand how interesting they are. You understand it if you are trying to progress up the ladder in your workplace. You dutifully perform your responsibilities. Yet you are yearning for a chance to shine, an opportunity to let management see your true potential, the quality of work you are capable of performing. Grandparents share that desire. You want to spend time with those grandchildren. But you want them to switch off their electronic devices long enough to actually spend time with you. You want to get to know them. And you want them to get to know you. You want to be seen as more than just an ATM and ice cream dispenser.

But there is also something more important as a Christian you would love to unveil in your life. There is a super power much more important than the kind we would like to unleash at school or work or with the family. There is a glory you want to unveil that could save more people than any superhero. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 the Apostle Paul calls it **"the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ."**

2. Veiled Glory Leads to Frustration

That's the exact reason why the Holy Spirit chose to include these words in the Bible. It's because ordinary Christians have as our calling the magnificent task of unveiling Christ's glory for the world to see. But here's the problem. When it comes time to actually unmask this glory of Christ, we so often see disappointment and frustration. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: **"our gospel is veiled."** (2 Corinthians 4:3)

You know that feeling from your own experiences. You talk to your sister-in-law about making regular, weekly church attendance a top priority. You try explaining how your soul needs regular nourishment from God's word, more than occasional spiritual support. But you get little more than a shrug and a smirk. You explain your position on social issues based on Scripture to a friend. You tell them how co-habitation before marriage and homosexual behaviors and other open sexual activities outside marriage are all lumped together as sins. God considers them all acts of rebellion against his design. But all you get is that look that says 'I pity your small-mindedness.'

The Apostle Paul addresses ordinary Christians in 2 Corinthians. He reminded them: **"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."** (2 Corinthians 4:3) The ones to whom he first wrote were feeling weak and very mortal, not super at all. They were feeling defeated and worn out from doing something very simple. They were carrying out their personal ministry of sharing the gospel with others. But they reacted the way fourth graders do when first learning long division. 'It's too hard!'

That's why St Paul explains this unbelieving response: **"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."** (2 Corinthians 4:4) It's normal. It's even natural to get this kind of response when sharing the gospel. It's not the response anyone wants, but it is even something we can expect from anyone whose heart has not been converted by the Holy Spirit.

3. We Have the Glory of God

St Paul's words in 2 Corinthians chapter four unmask this failure. Defeatism develops because hearts are veiled by unbelief. We feed into this defeatism when we take defeat personally. When we attempt to unmask the saving power of Jesus Christ we don't get the results we want. It turns out we aren't so super. Our powers are so ordinary. When we look inside we see mortality. We see weakness. Our unheroic and un-super actions reveal who we really are.

But that's because we're looking in the wrong place for glory. Look deeper past your skills and gifts. Keep on going past your personality and character. Look to the object of your faith to see what God has done. God wants you to know what you already have: **"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."** (2 Corinthians 4:6) The real superhero is Jesus Christ.

This is the lesson learned by Peter, James, and John on the mount of Transfiguration. The event of the Transfiguration is easily misunderstood. Just analyze Peter's reaction. He knew and confessed Jesus as the Christ, the promised Savior of the world. But he was confused, or at least uninformed, about the nature of Christ's glory. Peter wanted to construct simple shelters on that mountain so he could go on basking in Jesus' glory with Moses and Elijah. Peter went from fear to confusion. Eventually even his misplaced bravado was replaced with confident assurance because he was able to see God's glory "**in the face of Christ.**" (2 Corinthians 4:6)

4. Christ is the Truly Glorious One

When the Holy Spirit lifts the veil on anyone's heart, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God comes streaming in. When the Holy Spirit gets to unmask Jesus, he shows him to be the Savior far surpassing any superhero. The Holy Spirit lifts the veil of doubt and confusion, weakness and defeat plaguing your heart. Then you get to take your attention off of yourself and see Jesus for who he really is. The Jesus revealed for those apostles is the Jesus revealed to you today. And he is "**the image of God.**" (2 Corinthians 4:4) It doesn't mean Jesus is a copy or just a representation of God. It means Jesus shares in God's real being. The power and glory he manifests in his life is the actual glory and true power of God.

There is a reason my children don't mind going to Sam's. Even if they have to stay cooped up in the shopping cart, they know they might get some tasty samples. Manufacturers know that at least 20% of the time a sale is generated when they give you a portion, a small enough taste to leave you wanting more. With the right product, they can generate a sale 90% of the time. It's the same reason car dealers are so eager to get you to test drive one of their vehicles. It's a huge improvement over just walking around the car, kicking the tires. Once you get behind the wheel you can actually picture yourself as the new owner of that vehicle.

Peter, James, and John could have stayed up on that mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But the Transfiguration is just a sample. Through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us more than just a sample. Moses and Elijah were ranked #1 and #2 prophets respectively by the believers at the time when Jesus came. But Jesus didn't glory from having a pow-wow with religious heroes. His glory is seen when he descended the mountain. We get his glory because Jesus ascended the cross of shame and guilt, to lift off the guilt and shame of our sins. We have his glory because Jesus sunk down into his tomb only to rise in resurrection glory. His glory is yours. 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.**" (2 Corinthians 4:6) Moses and Elijah were just samples. The experience of Peter, James, and John was just a test drive. Today you get the real thing. The glory of Christ is yours.

5. We Are Preachers of Christ's Glory

2 Corinthians chapter four is bookended with this phrase: "**Therefore we do not lose heart.**" (2 Corinthians 4:1,16) When we see who the true superhero is and his superhoic sacrifice on behalf of humanity, it's impossible to be defeated. Jesus may have appeared weak and defeated. But those appearances allowed him to conquer the causes of our sin

and weakness. Sin, death, and the devil are all defeated by your Savior. Unlike Peter, James and John, Jesus doesn't want us to keep this message to ourselves.

The Apostle Paul helps us to put the focus in the right place: **“For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”** (2 Corinthians 4:5) You are simply a servant of Jesus. But you wield his powerful message. That means we don't offer the world our own solutions to its 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.

And do you know what happens when we take the pressure off of ourselves and stop worrying about results? 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 co-habiting friends or homosexual co-workers we can let them know that God condemns our lustful thoughts or impure TV viewing habits. That's when God's power reveals the darkness of unbelief. That's when God's power shines with the light of the gospel. You and I simply unmask that superheroic power.

In order to really enjoy one of those superhero movies, you need a healthy dose of suspension of disbelief. Where did they get their super powers? How did that distant planet give such benefits here on earth? How did that science experiment cause positive mutations? But when it comes to the glory of the gospel, God himself overcomes disbelief and doubt. By the power of the gospel we see Jesus as the one true hero the world needs. By focusing on the power of the gospel, we can unmask his glory to our world. Amen.

Sermon Goal: That believers would not cling to themselves for false hopes of glory or despair of our inability to attain true glory, but expand our vision to see Jesus' entire life and death as glorious and worthy of our reflection in our lives.