



Minister  
Dan Yeazel, preaching  
Kim Johnson

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*Transfiguration of the Lord*  
*February 18, 2007*

*2 Corinthians 3:12-4-2*

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### **Beyond the Veil**

Intro: In our reading this morning Paul gets his inspiration and his imagery from the passage in Exodus we just heard. The experience of Moses coming down the mountain after speaking with God. In this second letter to the Corinthians Paul celebrates the transforming power of God.

(Music) “Space...The final frontier.” For those of us who are “Star Trek” fans, these words bring a quickening of the pulse and a race of the imagination. As these words opened the show each week, somehow we were transplanted (or if Scotty had it working right we were transported) to another place and time. When the show started, suddenly gone were the limitations of physical laws like the speed of light, gone was the idea that humans are alone in the universe. When captain Kirk or Picard, said “Boldly go where no one has gone before” - we went. If only for an hour, and if only in our imagination.

This book I shared with the children is one that continues to captures my imagination, not just for the pictures, which I love, but for the words that accompany them. Astronauts, cosmonauts and all other kinds of “nauts” from around the world have tried to describe what it was like for them to voyage into space and return to Earth again. In spite of the mental breakdown that happened to one astronaut lately, spaceflight is seen and imagined to be life changing for the better. The author of this book asked many people who had flown into space to reflect on how the journey changed them emotionally and spiritually. Some said the experience was simply beyond words. Some did try to describe the changes and their words are fascinating.

An astronaut from Saudi Arabia said “the first day or so we all pointed to our countries. The third or fourth day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day we were aware of only one earth.” A Russian writes “During a space flight the psyche of each astronaut is reshaped. You become more full of life, softer. You begin to look at things with greater trepidation and you begin to be more kind and patient with the people around you.” (I have heard some people

wanting to send a loved one up for a rocket trip for just this very reason). And an American wrote: “We left as technicians and returned as humanitarians.”

These space travelers have seen things that not many, if any, of us will see first hand. They have gone beyond the veil of the earth and peeked further towards the edge of the universe than all others. It is great and fantastic stuff and many times there are no words for the experience. From the pictures and words we can get a glimpse of what it must have been like for them. But we still have to use our imagination for the universe is so vast that it always defy full explanation or definition.

Today’s passage defies full explanation as well. It takes a lot of imagination to get any kind of handle on what Moses’ experience was or just what Paul is talking about. This morning is Transfiguration Sunday, and we are not going to look at the well-known story about Jesus’ transfiguration and transformation on the mountaintop. But rather we will consider the transformation that is possible with each one of us, that Paul writes about to the church at Corinth. Moses and Jesus have changed with their direct encounters with the divine and Paul says that we may hope to expect nothing less.

Paul is writing to a conflicted church. Could be like the Presbyterian church today. They had been fighting over what was important to worship God rightly, who was most worthy and the like. Paul has been most discouraged up to this point, the communication between them seemed to be breaking down, but at this point in their relations, there is a marked turn. A sense of hope enters in as Paul begins to speak of veils that are no longer needed and the transforming power of being fully in the presence of God.

Throughout scripture, veils or curtains are a recurring image. And always they are meant to represent something that stands between the human and divine. We have read of how a veil covered Moses face to protect the Israelites from the shining it produced after he met with God face to face. In other parts of the Old Testament a veil covered the Ark of the Covenant as it traveled in the desert and it stood before the ark in the temple in the Holy of Holies. When Jesus died the curtain or veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Symbolically what had been concealed, was now revealed. What the law said should be kept under wraps and set apart, was now for everyone.

Paul is saying this as he writes “the veil that Moses wore is no longer required”. Supposedly Moses needed it because his face shown so brightly from his encounter with God and it would be too much for the people to bear if they looked on him directly. Paul now says veils become a problem. If one is glowing from a changing encounter with God, one ought to be visible to others, as evidence of God’s transforming grace. The veil that Paul is talking about at this point is not a literal one, but rather figuratively the veil of the Corinthians, the thing that keeps them

from fully seeing God, was their devotion to mosaic law. See how the veil has moved, from Moses to keep the divine, in, behind his veil, to now Paul writing about veils as something to keep the divine out.

The Corinthians devotion to the old was a veil, they couldn't see through it, beyond it to the wonder of Christ. Don't we have some veil, some devotion to an idea or event that we allow to obscure our sense of the holy? It could be a painful event in the past, it could be ideas we grew up with that we have not yet been able to challenge and change in ourselves. But something that keeps us grounded in the here and now and keeps us from experiencing a freedom like no other that might draw us nearer to God?

Transformation is not painless. We sense some of Paul's pain in this letter. He too had studied the law, he had believed in it. Then he had encountered the risen lord and he had been changed. But his people hadn't. Direct encounters with the Holy always change us. but the experiences can bring pain as well as joy. I think many of us would agree that God's presence has been most keenly felt in times of great pain, when our lives were changing in ways we wish they were not.

When Moses spoke with God, Moses discovered a presence a personality, before whom he could totally unveil himself. There were no barriers. God understood him and still loved him. It was an unconditional love, like no other that Moses had ever experienced. No wonder he shone.

Paul says we too can all shine. We too will be transformed as we draw neared to God. That's what we hope happens during Lent. That we can bring our whole selves to these forty days and drop the veil that would keep us from seeing and experiencing God fully. So that we too can reflect the love of God and become changed.

During WW2 a British pilot, John Magee, wrote a famous poem titled High Flight, it is for many pilots and non-pilots one of the most moving expressions of the change in perspective that flying can bring.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air. . . .

Up, up the long, delirious burning blue  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace  
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew —  
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

May we do that. May we take courage and boldness from Paul's words so that we might risk going beyond our veils, whatever they may be, and risk the changes that will happen when we dare to seek God face to face. We don't need to leave the ground, but can we imagine our spirits soaring when we reach out to touch the face of God and we find God is already there, already touching our face ready to begin a new and intimate relationship, where we need not hide any of ourselves, and change begins. This Lenten season we will be transformed, reflecting the light and love of our God and we will see that same light and love in our neighbor as well. Amen.