

February 11, 2018  
Transfiguration Sunday  
2 Corinthians 3:12-13; 4:1-6, Mark 9:2-9

On that high mountain, with Jesus transfigured before them adorned in the brightest white ever beheld and speaking to Moses and Elijah—the Law and the Prophets of their Old Testament Bible—was anything unclear to Peter, James and John?

I ask this question because what Peter, James and John received on that mountain is what many of us doubting Christians desire—a grand epiphany, a revealing of Jesus Christ to us in all His glory so that we might be reassured that He is the Messiah and that we'd never doubt again. The transfiguration of Christ is that; the door of heaven cracked open a bit that the glory of Christ's divinity would shine through. But, was anything unclear to Peter, James and John?

Yes! A lot! If you keep reading they have plenty of questions, the first of which is wondering what Christ means with His talk of rising from the dead! The simple fact is that despite this indescribably glorious vision of Christ they witnessed with their own eyes, you believers sitting here this day have a better understanding of Christ than they did!

They had the flash, the light, the cloud, the booming voice, "*This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*" But they were still clueless about Christ. If that was all they got, it wouldn't have done them a bit of good.

You have more. You have the fulfilled Word of God. You have the cross and the empty tomb. You have the truth of this Son, this God/man Jesus made to be your sin crucified on the cross and then your firstfruit of life everlasting risen from the dead. Beyond that, you have the church Christ established and gave the authority to forgive all the sins of those who repent and believe this good news. You have His Holy Baptism commanded for this same forgiveness. You have His body and blood in the

Holy Supper confirming salvation and strengthening faith. You have more. Although this salvation has yet to come to full completion, you have it all.

It is important you know this. It is important you believe this. Satan, the world and your own sinful self will tell you this is not enough. They tell you that you need the mountain and the glory that is found there. They'll tell you the cross is not enough.

Five hundred years ago the Reformation was about just this; that the cross was enough. The Roman church proclaimed good works, indulgences, pilgrimages and observances had to be added and a lot of that teaching continues today. Luther corrected this, but you'll still find a lot of "good" Lutherans leaning on the Law rather than the Gospel because they feel pretty good about themselves, because there is some glory of themselves to be found in good works.

Today a lot of folks are following teachers of glory—the glory that God will give those in this life who faithfully follow Him, be it the glory of wealth or health or happiness, because, well, the cross isn't enough. Holy Scripture never teaches this, but people want this stuff, always have, so they're willing to listen to what their itching ears want to hear. And there's lots of "good Lutherans" who expect life will be good and glorious to them for their piety.

I know a number of folks who have left our denomination because it's not modern, lively and entertaining for churches with really good praise bands that really make them feel "spiritual". The message preached isn't such a downer about poor, miserable sinners. It's uplifting and makes you feel good. I've listened to some of these messages on the internet, some from the local churches here. There isn't much sin and forgiveness proclaimed because, I guess, the cross isn't enough, isn't the kind of glory folks want. But there are plenty of "good Lutherans" who complain about the old hymns, boring liturgy, unyielding teaching and the fact that the pastor preaches the same thing week after week—the

cross. What they want is the mountain top, the glorious spiritual high, not another stanza of “A Mighty Fortress”.

St. Paul writes, *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

The Gospel is not your good works, your obedience, your faith, your spiritual feelings, your happy, healthy, prosperous life now. The Gospel is not bright and flashy and awesome like that mountain top, not glorious the way we count glory. The Gospel is the ugliness of our vile sin infesting the perfect and innocent Son of God as He hangs dying on the cross. The Gospel is Jesus rejected, but not rejecting, loving the unlovable to death and then rising to eternal life. The Gospel is this truth spreading not by the proclamation of angels hosts in glorious visions, but by the simple words of believers sharing this truth and it being received by faith.

This is clear to you. This Gospel that Peter, James and John didn’t yet know on that mountain top with all that glory, this Gospel is what saves...not the stuff the world calls glorious.

But this Gospel is veiled when the glory is what is preached and practiced, because you can twist it around and dress it up in all sorts of pious, churchy trappings, but when the point is your works, your obedience, your faithfulness, your spiritualness, your good Lutheranism...it’s no longer Christ’s glory, is it? It’s yours. And you’re not the Gospel. *“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.”*

Christ glorified is Christ crucified. And one cannot see Christ's cross with eyes of faith without seeing one's own sin crucified there with Him, and this truth shames us, humbles us so that we give all the glory to God with absolutely none for ourselves. Yet in this is great joy because we know the Christ who has won all glory by His cross and empty tomb is indeed our Lord, Savior and friend who keeps all His promises and will on day return to take us to where He is, and we will partake of His glory, not our own.

The long and short of it today it this—beware of the veils. I know I sometimes come down pretty hard on new worship styles and music, other denominations and non-denominations. I don't apologize for that. I give thanks to God for all of them that keep the proclamation of the cross, of the sin and forgiveness found there in Christ, front and center. There the light shines out of darkness with the light of the knowledge of God's true glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

But where a church first and foremost preaches work and obedience, or faith unto earthly blessings, or one's gooey spiritual feelings, where the songs repeat "me, me, me, my, my, my, I, I, I,"; there I see veils. I see self-glory that isn't glory taking center stage. I see people feeling good about themselves where there should be humble thanksgiving and homage to their king. And I often see the same problem in a lot of good Lutherans, including the one speaking right now.

But by the grace of God, these veils do cover the Gospel to us! The glory of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is not covered. We stumble in foolish pride and earthly glories, but God's Spirit calls us out. We turn and return to it in repentance and faith, and see the Gospel in the face of Jesus, our king of glory. Thanks be to God, we see the veils for what they are—false glory. And in Word and Sacrament we receive the gift of forgiveness and salvation, not from the Mount of Transfiguration, but from the hill of Calvary—from the glorious cross of Christ.

Amen.