



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 22, 2009

Last Sunday after Epiphany

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 2 Kings 2:1-12a

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 148

Second Lesson: 2nd Corinthians 4:3-6

Gospel: Mark 9:2-9

Know the Glory of God

See it in the face of Christ

See it in spite of attempts to blind

Any of you hear ever received the advice when it's really cold outside, "Don't stick your tongue on anything metal"? Any of you ever heard that? Any of you ever done it – have to rip a chunk of your tongue off to get the tongue off the metal? If you heard the advice, everyone here has probably heard it and probably knows you shouldn't do that, but those of you that have ever done it have a different kind of knowledge about not doing it again, right? You have a whole different set of reminders that it's not really a bright thing to do.

There are really a couple kinds of knowledge in this lifetime, right? Knowledge that we have because we've been informed, we've been told, and we know it; and the knowledge that comes from experience. You've experienced something so it sticks with you, maybe even a little bit more at times.

You hear an account like the Gospel we read today. There's Peter, James and John up on that mountain with Jesus and all of a sudden things completely change from anything they have ever seen in their life before. You read the different Gospel accounts and what you read are men that are trying to find words to describe the indescribable. Jesus is transfigured. His full divine glory as true God from all eternity is revealed. Mark talked about how his clothes turned white, whiter than anyone could bleach them. Other Gospel writers said he shone like the sun. You can just see they are trying to put into human words things that cannot be expressed by human words, the full glory of God.

We might think, "I wish I could have seen something like that. My life would be different. I wouldn't do all the stupid things I do because I'm a sinner if I'd have actually seen the full glory of God." This morning our God tells us you have seen the full glory of God. He tells us that God, the same God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" and created light out of darkness has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. And the word he uses here for "knowledge" is the word we would use for knowledge that comes through experience. We've experienced the full glory of God even though we haven't seen what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We have seen the full glory of God and we have seen how it has touched us, how it has changed us, how it has made us something that we were not by birth. We who by birth are destined to rot in hell eternally, where the worm does not die and the fires do not go out, that's what we are destined for. But our God has changed us because he has shone the light of the Gospel into our hearts and the Spirit has worked faith in us to lead us to believe that what Jesus did for the world – living perfectly without sin and then dying with all of our sin – what he did for the world, he has done for us individually. We are reminded that we have that full glory and we have it every day with us in the Gospel.

But we are also reminded that while we live in this sinful world, we're not alone. We have an enemy that is constantly attacking. It's trying to blind us like it has blinded unbelievers. It's trying to drop a veil over our eyes like it's dropped a veil over the eyes of an unbeliever. So we are encouraged to stick to it, focus on the face of Christ where you will see the full knowledge of the glory of God.

Paul wrote that to encourage the Corinthians and he wrote it to people that he was under attack from. Some in that congregation in Corinth were attacking him. The super apostles were there among them and they said "That Paul; he doesn't talk so good. He doesn't sound that smart. He doesn't look that impressive. He's not like these guys are." So they were attacking his ministry. But notice how he defends his ministry even in the middle of this beautiful Gospel section. He says, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

That's kind of an important phrase that we shouldn't just pass over, and we should apply it to our lives. We don't preach ourselves; we preach Jesus Christ. That's important for you to remember and for me to remember when we share Christ with someone. We invite them to worship. We tell them who Jesus is and what he has done for them. And if they don't act on it, we feel rejected, right? We put ourselves on the line and we feel rejected. He's telling us, "We're not preaching ourselves. It's not about me. It's about Jesus." It's Jesus who has been rejected. So Paul can continue to serve them because he views himself literally, he doesn't say "servant," he says "slave." "I am a slave to you. I am owned by you because I have the responsibility to continue to share with you, to serve you by sharing with you the full glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether you are going to believe it or not. It's not about me. It's about the glory of the Gospel and your desperate need to hear it, so I'm going to keep sharing it with you."

That's something we always need to remember for ourselves also. Although you and I who are here this morning might know the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there are many, many temptations to have that veil dropped over our eyes, to take our eyes off of the glory of the face of Christ. One of the places where you and I come into contact with the glory of the Gospel in a way like no other is in the Lord's Supper. We set it apart. We sing the song of the angels that the angels sang in the presence of God right before the Words of Institution because we are saying God is coming to us. We are in his presence in a way like no other way. He's coming to us with the very body and blood that was given and poured out to take away our sins. We receive it in, with and

under the bread and the wine. The glory of Christ is right there. It's something we can taste, we can touch, and we can smell. Satan knows that and he knows how important it is for you and me so he tries to distract us.

I'll give you an example. When I was a kid growing up, in our church, I don't remember if we went up the outside aisle or the inside aisle, and we had one row across where you knelt and you received the Lord's Supper and then you went back; I don't remember anymore if it was down the inside or the outside, but you know what I'm talking about, how every church does communion. When I was a kid, when I started going to communion, I'd sit there as we were singing the hymn and I'd be counting out in front of me how many people that is, how many tables that would be, trying to figure out whether or not I would have to be the first one to go up there. If I'm the first one that has to go up there, what if I go back the wrong way or do the wrong thing? What if a screw that up? So here I am, in the presence of the face of the glory of God, the Lord's Supper, the most incredible thing, the Gospel coming to us so tangibly, and I'm worried about where I'm going to be in line.

Do you think Satan dropped a veil over my eyes so that I didn't appreciate the full glory of the Gospel of Christ that I was receiving there? Do you think he distracted me a little bit, a little sleight of hand pointing me over in this direction so I didn't see the glory of the Gospel that was right here? Does Satan do stuff like that to us at times? You bet.

Have you ever been in church when we are singing a hymn that's maybe not as familiar, one that we don't know real well? Did you ever hear at the end of that hymn (bang)? Someone closes their hymnal real loud to let you know that hymn just shouldn't be sung in a Christian church. If we get that upset that we have to slam our hymnal after we sing a hymn, what are we focused on as we sing the hymn? The glory of God and the face of Christ, or my own belly button; what I like and what I don't like? Which is it? Does Satan get us to have our head so far up ourselves at times that we don't see the glory of God because we are focused on what we like and what we don't like? You bet he does! That's how he drops a veil over us.

There are a lot of ways he does that. You can go on and on with this kind of stuff, how he veils our eyes so we don't see the glory of Christ. Basically he does it by getting us to focus on ourselves. "I shouldn't have to suffer. I shouldn't have to face difficulty." When I think about that, I don't see God's promises – "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. I am with you always to the very ends of the age." He veils it because he gets me to think that sin isn't so bad. Sin is ugly and abhorrent to my God – no, sin is actually going to be beneficial to me in this instance is what I convince myself of. You can fill in the blanks on these kinds of things.

Any time we aren't focused on who God is and what he has done for us, Satan is dropping the veil over our eyes. Any time that we're focused only on ourselves, Satan is dropping the veil over our eyes. It's easy to do because our sinful nature loves to think about only ourselves, loves to think only about our own pleasures, and loves to think about how everything affects me. It's hard enough to focus on God let alone focus

on serving God by serving one another. That's an even tougher step for us to take because we are so busy focusing on ourselves.

Then when our eyes are opened by God, when he gets us to be honest with ourselves and he leads us to see that we are more self-absorbed than we should be and that we have rationalized sin where we shouldn't have, our God comes to us not with "I told you so. Now you are going to go to hell." Our God comes to us with the message of the glory of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ – that Jesus has taken away every last one of our self-absorbed sins. He was perfect in our place and never gave in to any of those temptations of Satan. He saw through the veil every time Satan tried to drop it over his eyes. He was perfect because God demands that perfection of you and me. Then he took every one of our self-absorbed, ego-boosting, big-headed decisions, and he carried them to the cross and he died for them. He took every last bit of the cup of God's wrath and drank it to the last drop so that you and I can stand in this newness of life knowing that God has forgiven us – not because of who we are, not because we've tried hard, but because of the glory of God in the face of Christ. The pure and absolute unadulterated love that he has for us that led him to go through all of that so that we might stand forgiven; then, standing forgiven, that we might live in the glory of God in the face of Christ, that we might live in this newness of life and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

As we face the struggles of this life, see them through the glory of God and the face of Christ. As we struggle with worries and anxieties, see them through the glory of God and the face of Christ. The God who loved you enough to stretch out his arms on the cross isn't going to abandon you now because you've got a tough time. He isn't going to abandon you now because some of your retirement funds have abandoned you. He isn't going to abandon you now because someone you love has abandoned you or is gone.

See the glory of God and live in it.