### “Seeing the Glory” Steve Finlan for The First Church, March 2, 2025

**2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

12We act with great boldness, 13not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there . . . 16but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

**Luke 9:28-36**

28 Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure . . . 32 Peter and his companions saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. 34While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 36When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Our Bible passages today focus on revelations of transformation, revealing some of the changes—the spiritual glory—that we will experience, as well as the transformed appearance of Jesus as he prayed on the mountain. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the glory that believers will take on as they are transformed, step by step, into greater degrees of spirituality, reflecting the image of the Lord. Just as the moon reflects light from the sun, we will reflect spiritual light from the Lord. What an interesting promise! Paul emphasizes our progressive transformation, from one degree of glory into another, as we willingly follow God’s will. Apparently glory is used here to describe spiritual status and reality.

In our lives now, day by day, we are planting seeds of growth that will blossom as God’s plan for us becomes clear. We certainly can’t think of the afterlife as static or boring! It will be quite amazing, you can be sure! And this doesn’t mean slavery to the Spirit. In fact, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). We will be following some kind of plan, tailor-made for each one of us; it will not be random or aimless, but it will involve an expression of creative freedom, along with challenges and adventures. Doing God’s will does not mean a narrowing or restriction of life, but its blossoming. And we play some role in our own blossoming, or he wouldn’t emphasize freedom.

I don’t know why this isn’t everybody’s favorite passage from Paul! It’s got freedom, it’s got the Spirit, it’s got a promise of the Scriptures opening up for us, it’s got us reflecting Jesus and being changed into the same likeness from stage to stage. It’s the promise of endless spiritual progress, with completion in love.

The Luke passage tells us about three apostles getting a glimpse of Jesus’ spiritual appearance, which was dazzling, as were the appearances of the two beings who spoke with Jesus. The apostles are no doubt stunned by what they see, and Peter blurts out a well-intentioned response: why don’t we build three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah? But Jesus doesn’t need a shrine. What he *does* need is focused attention, and so the voice that had spoken at the baptism of Jesus now speaks again, saying “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (9:35). God speaks, to tell them to listen to what his Son would say.

We can think of Jesus as our older brother, as he lived an earth life with all of its joys and sorrows. But we can also think of Jesus as our Master Teacher, come to earth to reveal the true nature of God the Father, and our potential as spiritual brothers and sisters.

Now, I am guessing that Peter, James, and John, who were already listening to Jesus closely, listened even more closely forever after this. They knew their assignment—to listen to Jesus! But they had to keep the amazing story of what they had seen to themselves, at least for a while. It must have burned within them; they looked forward to being able to tell their apostle fellows what they had seen on the mountain, but they couldn’t say until, apparently, after the Resurrection. What they saw was an advance look at the next lifetime, at the time when we will all have spiritual bodies. Aside from the amazing experience, though, they didn’t at this time learn much that was specific about the afterlife. Paul seems to be the one who can confidently preach about the afterlife, and reveals what he knows.

In a long passage in First Corinthians, he says there are many kinds of bodies; there are earthly bodies and heavenly bodies, physical bodies and spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:40, 44). First comes the physical, then the spiritual; first we resemble the man of dust, then we will resemble the man of heaven (15:46–49). It is not flesh and blood that inherits the kingdom of God, but the imperishable body (15:50, 54).

In the Second Corinthians passage, he talks about our gradual transformation into a more spiritual likeness, a process that begins here on earth, with the seeds we plant today, and continues in a new body in a new life hereafter. In First Corinthians he talks about an imperishable, spiritual body. In Second Corinthians he uses the language of “glory,” with our being transformed from one degree of glory to another, when we will radiate the goodness of God’s love. I think this refers to the same process, to the spiritual progress we will make in the afterlife.

Frankly, we don’t know much about the details or the physics—or the metaphysics—of that process. But we know enough now to get started in our progress along that road. Everyone has enough to go on, if they are honest of heart and yearn for connection with God. As we seek God’s will and follow the spiritual path, we “are being transformed into the same image”; what an astonishing promise!

Life is all about growth, and the Second Corinthians passage is one of our key growth passages. It also promises that we are not losing our freedom when we proceed along this path, in fact, it is a path of freedom. I think when a person decides to follow God’s will, that opens up the person’s creativity. God’s plan becomes clearer as we live into it. We do not become robots or slaves who do only what they are told; rather, the way of creative unfoldment is opened up for them, and their own creative striving for unity with God is part of what brings that unity about. We will all retain our uniqueness, our style, as we are drawn into God’s family and do God’s will. Mama Cass sang “make your own kind of music, sing your own special song, make your own kind of music, even if nobody else sings along.” I would say God will draw that song into the heavenly chorus, and allow your unique song to be part of the music in heaven. There will be amazing harmonies!

I really believe the teaching, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). Let your creative freedom express your yearning for God, for love, for goodness. Continue to seek to understand God, to build a relationship with our loving heavenly Father. Look ahead to the time when we will raise our voices together in a heavenly chorus of thanksgiving, hope, and love.