### “The Face of Jesus Christ” Steve Finlan for The First Church, February 11, 2024

**2 Corinthians 4:3–6**

3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4In 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. 5For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. 6For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**Mark 9:2–9**

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

There is so much we don’t know, not only about our own future, but about the world, too. You could say there is much that is veiled from us, hidden from us, even in this scientific age. Why do dormant volcanoes become active again? What is the origin of Lou Gehrig’s disease? Why is *pi* a strange irrational number, 3.1415926 and on and on without repetition, *ad infinitum*? We really don’t know.

Both our Scriptures today have something to do with what is veiled and what is revealed. Paul speaks of the gospel being veiled to unbelievers, who have been blinded by the god of this world, by whom he means the devil. Verses 4 and 6 are very important for the understanding of who Christ is. Verse 4 says he “is the image of God.” That is, Jesus is like a reflection of God for us to see. And he makes a similar point in verse 6, where God shines in our hearts to open them to the spiritual shining of Jesus, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The “face” means the personality of Jesus. In the person of Jesus we see the glory of God, and we gain knowledge of that glory. The word for “shine” is *lampsen*, so Christ is the lamp of God.

This is a central teaching of what we call Christology. Jesus is the lamp of God. He is the image of God. In his “face,” that is, his person, we learn about the glory of God. This is mostly a statement about Jesus’ spiritual role, but we have a story about his *literal* luminescence here. On a certain day in the middle of his ministry, after their trip to Caesarea-Philippi when Jesus asked “who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27), and between his first and second predictions of his death, he took his three apostle friends with him up a mountain and was transfigured in their sight. He became dazzlingly white, and then two other beings appeared with him, whom the apostles interpreted as being Elijah and Moses. Not knowing what to say, Peter asked if they want three tents put up, for the three of them. After this a heavenly voice spoke, saying “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mark 9:7). Suddenly the two visitors were gone and Jesus was back to normal.

They were told not to tell anyone about this sighting “until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (9:9). The message about Jesus was not really supposed to be characterized by supernatural and miraculous events. He wanted them to teach the *spiritual* message, and not focus on his power. He wanted them to have faith in God, to tell people to receive the kingdom as a little child (Mark 10:15), to love God and to love one’s neighbor (12:33), to determine to do the will of God (3:35), and to emphasize service: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant” (10:43). This was the spiritual focus that Jesus tried to get his apostles to follow.

The Transfiguration was an exceptional event, not meant to become a central part of the message the apostles were to share. So why were they allowed to witness it? Perhaps it was to strengthen their belief in Jesus’ divinity, something they would need down the road, but not during Jesus’ life and while they were preaching the gospel. People were not supposed to accept the gospel because of supernatural works and wonders, but because of spiritual truth resonating in their hearts and minds. And yet, the supernatural power of Jesus would eventually become an important part of the message.

It seems there are the primary truths of the gospel (love, service, faith, seeking to do the will of God) and there are secondary truths (such as Jesus’ divinity). After a number of healings, such as after healing Jairus’s daughter, he “strictly ordered” people not to talk about it (Mark 5:43). When he cured a deaf man, “Jesus ordered them to tell no one” (Mark 7:36).

Humans have a tendency to focus on the dramatic and spectacular, and Jesus needed them to focus on the essential and valuable, instead. He also knew that we would grow in our perception of values, that our spiritual understanding would grow. He trusted his disciples to have the ability to grow. He trusted that the word would fall in good soil, which means in those who “hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (Luke 8:15).

We, too, should hold fast the truth, and should be able to put the spiritual truths we have learned ahead of our belief in miracles. Truth includes statements about God’s love and fairness, and God setting out to fulfill a great destiny for us, as Psalm 138 says, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me” (138:8). And the next line tells us an eternal truth: “your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever” (138:8).

Shelagh Denholm tells her story, that when her parents divorced, she went to live with her grandparents, who were not that excited to have small children. She grew up with an intense need to be liked. She became a nurse, was good at her job, but became almost anorexic and was a people-pleaser. She partly turned her life around when she started going to a church, but it didn’t last. She became bulemic and could not sustain relationships. She planned suicide. Then she got an invitation to an evening Youth Christian meeting, and she went. A young German man asked her if she was okay. At first she lied and said “yes,” then she broke down and said “no,” and cried. An older man said to her “God will always love you, He’ll never go off you or get tired of you.” She said, “Where is this God, I want to know Him.” She felt God’s presence in that meeting. She went home and prayed on her knees to be forgiven and healed. She says when she woke up the next day, she was no longer bulemic. She gives thanks to God every day.

So, for us: Let us turn our eyes toward the spiritual level, towards truths that endure forever, and to which we are loyal. Spiritual truth is not veiled, but sometimes we fail to recognize it. Stop and think, maybe list out the spiritual truths that you know. These should be the basis for your reflecting and your living. And so, when you go with God, you go with the truths you have discerned and cherished, such as that God loves you and will never get tired of you. That’s a relief. *I* get tired of me, but God does not!