### “Being Renewed” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 9, 2024

**2 Corinthians 4:3–6, 16**

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. . . 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

**Mark 3:31–35**

31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

When we gather we practice the joy of communing. It’s a joy to worship together, and to be face to face, sharing our faith. Less common today is the art of writing to bring people together. Paul did that in his letters to the churches, which the churches preserved for us. What we see today is not only a message delivered and received, but a certain seriousness about *acting* upon it.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians has three intriguing statements. First, the gospel is veiled only to those who reject it, because their minds are blinded from the truth about Christ. Secondly, that truth is that Christ “is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). What we see is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). In the “face,” that is, the *person* of Jesus, we see the glory of God. Jesus is the revealer of the Father, whom we cannot see. Third, comes a statement that those who know Jesus have their inner nature renewed “day by day” (4:16). So the passage is mostly about Jesus and his role as revealer of the Father, but finishes with a pleasing piece of information about us, and what we will experience when we act upon the word, when we put the divine into our actions.

What about the gospel story? It’s a bit unusual, in that not many stories about the adult Jesus involve his family in any way. His family interrupts his preaching to try to get his attention. But Jesus is not going to call them up applaud them. Instead, he makes the spiritual point that his true brothers and sisters and mother are those who do the will of God.

He makes it clear that no special status comes with their biological relation to him. There will be no traditional hierarchies, no nepotism, no favoritism. If you want to be part of his family, you must learn the spiritual principles and put them into practice, just like anybody else. But those who *do* practice the teachings get the amazing status of being brothers and sisters of Jesus. Isn’t it astounding to think of yourself as a brother or sister in Jesus’ family? His own family doesn’t seem to grasp this principle, at least at first. His brother James grasps it later, and wrote an important letter, in which he addresses his readers as “brothers and sisters” (James 1:2), and says “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you” (1:5). He grasped the ungrudging kindness of God, which Jesus taught. The whole letter embodies moral sensitivity, along with a high degree of reverence for God. It seems that James, the other brothers, and Mary only got the message after the Spirit of Truth was poured out.

Those who *do* get the message learn to trust and draw upon God’s guidance, as revealed by Jesus. As Paul’s letter says, we see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). I could emphasize the *knowledge* of God gained through observing Jesus. I could also read that sentence while emphasizing the *light* of that knowledge, putting an emphasis on the light of truth. Or we could emphasize Jesus himself, the fact that we need to study his character, his kindness, and *then* we get the truth about God. And then, even if our physical bodies are “wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (4:16). Having faith will not suspend the aging process, but it will result in a continual *spiritual* growth and empowerment. We can get this same empowerment if we think of ourselves as Jesus’ brother or sister. It’s such a high honor.

In his face, that is, in his personality, we see the glory of God. We see the character of God. We see the mercy of God. But we also see a no-nonsense emphasis on what is important. He does not cave in to family pressure for fame and attention. He would, however, stop his preaching for people seeking his healing power, or people breaking through the roof over his head in order to get close enough to hear.

And there is a promise of spiritual support and reward in this matter of doing God’s will. This is an idea that isn’t emphasized enough in Christian preaching. The supreme goal of every Christian should be to do the will of God. This idea can become the focus of our living, and something that we will get better at as we attempt to practice it. Of course, we will need to engage in course correction from time to time, as our understanding improves. Our ability to discern the will of God will grow over time, as we attempt to practice that discernment. God knows we need help, and he provides it.

When we say that the Spirit guides us, we mean that the Spirit *attempts* to guide us, but is sometimes thwarted by our confusion and mental distortion, yet still seeks to guide us in the right direction. We will grow in wisdom over time, often by making mistakes. Yet, as today’s epistle tells us, we will be renewed inwardly, day by day, *every* day. Along with the renewing will come reorienting and course correction, so that we might become better at discerning the will of God for us. We must pray and listen for hints and messages as well as for values and inspiration.

When we set out to *do* that part of the will of God that we *do* understand, then we become better at understanding the next step in the will of God. Use a many-sided approach. Use your intellect, your memory, your hopes. Use Scripture and reflection. Pray, and use some of your prayer time for *listening* and *receiving*. Use all the tools at your disposal to reflect upon what the will of God is for you. Your mind will be renewed. Paul says “be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

But there’s no formula, no set procedure for finding out the will of God. There is always some uncertainty in our minds as we set out to find it. And it is that very uncertainty about the will of God that is one of our greatest blessings. Because of that uncertainty, we have to allow for individual diversity and personal discovery. Such discovery becomes one of the marks of Christian faith. There can never be a totalitarian, rigid, determination of the will of God, the same for everybody, because everybody is *not* the same, and not everyone has the same calling in life. Christian faith must always allow room for each person to find the kingdom of God within himself or herself. There will be diversity, even oddity, within the family of God, as there are within all happy families on earth. There is room for quirkiness, for different flavors and styles. Yet, if we all become adept at learning the will of God for us, we will harmonize well with others who are on their own quests. “Live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18), we are told. There are some things that are the will of God for everyone, such as do justice and love mercy, don’t lie, cheat, or steal; and there are some things that are specific for individuals, such as become a teacher, become a policeman, marry this person.

Set out on *your* voyage to discover both the general and the specific will of God, so they become a part of *your* life experience. No one else can draw it out for you. You have to discover it as you live. Psychiatrist Rebecca Mandeville says that you may have to stop “distort[ing] or hid[ing] your true self in order to protect the feelings of others.” Self-discovery takes courage. You may have to heroically break the rules that have structured you and kept you performing a role in a dysfunctional system. To break out of that system you may need to start listening to your dreams and deepest hopes, and release everything that feels false (psychcentral.com/lib/10-strategies-for-discovering-and-living-as-your-true-self#4).

Being transformed is a learn-as-you-go experience. It’s there for the grasping. Be unafraid. Go with God.