



Unveiling

2 Corinthians 3:12-42

Luke 9:28-36

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Note on the Gospel lesson: This has to do with something Luke tells us that neither Matthew nor Mark mention in their accounts of this event: Peter, James, and John woke up in the middle of this. That is, Luke says that they were “weighed down with sleep” and then, “when they were fully awake, they saw his glory.” Now, it may be that they were dozing off; but I think that for at least a few brief moments, they saw what was really there. They truly were fully awake. The veil came off, the interference of the world dropped away, and they saw God’s glory in Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

There is more to reality than we usually see.

When we got our most recent puppy, a standard poodle named Merry Christmas (and yes, we got her just before Christmas as a gift to the family), while she was a beautiful animal, lithe, perfectly proportioned, and smart, she was young – only 9 weeks old. Over the next couple of weeks, not only did she grow physically, one day Valerie looked at her face and realized that Merry’s “lights” had come on: suddenly, there was a personality, a living mind visible in her eyes. Not that anything had looked wrong to begin with; but suddenly there was a whole lot *more there*. An awareness had awakened; her true nature began to emerge.

It seems to me that animals are better at showing their creator’s mark than humans; at least better than adult humans. Or perhaps, they can’t hide it as well. They don’t have the baggage of being people, for one thing – the inner conflict and complexities of relationships that ordinary people can experience. There’s an intensity of purpose, of animal identity, certainly; but there’s also that spark in there, that just shows. I’ve often heard people say, when an animal is busy doing whatever it’s meant to do, how *beautiful* it is: yes. That’s exactly right. Watching a gazelle run across the savannah, becoming weightless as it bounds without apparent effort, is an amazing thing. Just being itself displays God’s purpose.

Awed by God's artistry, the poet William Blake wrote,

“TIGER, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?”

Peter, James and John got a glimpse of God's creation when they went with Jesus up the mountain, and Jesus showed himself to them as he is, an event we call the Transfiguration. Jesus' face changes, and his clothes turn brilliant white, and two others appear with him. They are Moses and Elijah, two men who had very special relationships with God, who now are transformed, shed of the worldly things that can obscure God's Spirit within us. They, like Jesus, were unveiled: they radiated God.

Peter's natural reaction was to try to capture the moment, to grab on and hold this incredible display of unfiltered divinity. That's no surprise; Moses himself tried to keep the glow his face got when he stood before God and received the Law. Or, at least, he tried to keep everyone else from seeing that the shine faded after a while. For Moses, that glow was a handy reminder for the often-ornery people he led that he, Moses, was different: he had special access to God, and God left his mark on him. For Peter, James, and John – and you and me – what they saw is a reminder that God still leaves his mark on us.

There's lots of things we don't see, things that aren't so much hidden from us as we just aren't used to seeing them. We either don't know what we're looking at, or we don't see it for what it is.

An engineer sees a structural problem in a building, because her training tells her what to look for. A hunter sees movement in the woods, because that's what he seeks. A truck driver sees something developing up ahead and takes action. A physician sees in a tiny change that *this* treatment is working. And disciples of Jesus? We *should* see God's creation when we look at other people.

But it's not that simple. We're humans, after all, and life can get in the way, dull our senses to God's presence around us, and especially to Christ in our fellows. Luke said that Peter, James and John woke up to see Jesus, Moses, and Elijah; how do *we* “fully wake up”?

You and I probably haven't ever seen someone transfigured like Jesus was. But we have met special people. You know who I'm talking about; these are the people that are simply special somehow; they may not literally shine, but we say that they “light up a room,” don't we?

People like this, though, are exceptional. We're used to something less. That's part of what makes the difference stand out so much.

Before I went to seminary, I worked in the alumni office at my college for a brilliant man. Driven, aggressive, Joe had a knack for putting his finger squarely on the weak spot of others. But he had a friend, another alumnus of our school, Bill, whom even he couldn't bring himself to criticize. More than once, my boss said of him that while Bill could see the flaw in a proposal or a plan better than anyone he knew, Joe had never heard him say a critical word about a person. In fact, Bill always managed to find something positive to highlight.

Now that's a rare skill. But the mere fact that my hyper-critical boss couldn't even bring himself to make a snide remark about how unwaveringly positive Bill was speaks to the power of what Bill was doing: looking for the good – the God – in *everybody*. And because everyone knew that Bill was also a man of deep faith, when they saw that attitude shining forth, they attributed it to God.

People saw something extraordinary in Bill. If William Blake, who wrote so penetratingly about the character of the maker of the tiger, were to wonder about the nature of *your* creator from what he saw on the outside, what sort of poem do you think he'd write?

Moses' face shone because he had been with God, in a very special way. But what caused Moses' face to shine with was not that he'd seen God, but that God had seen *him*. God revealed himself to Moses. God focused his attention on him. God saw Moses, and he shone.

We know, because Scripture says in so many ways, and Jesus told us himself, that God sees us, too. Not as a crowd, either, or part of a crowd, but each and every one of us, as if there was only one of us.

Although we don't always (or even often) see the radiance of God's attention shining out from the faces of those around us doesn't mean it's not there. Part of our humanness is being able to obscure, to hide, what's in us from those around.

And God is in us. We were made by those same divine fingers, according to the same plan, that made the tiger, burning bright; that made the beauty of an animal just being what it was made to be; that made Bill, who was so gracious; that made Moses and Elijah, God's special representatives; that gave Jesus Christ, to make us whole. God made us to shine with a glow that makes Moses' face look like midnight: the light of God's love in Christ.

Every now and then, we get to see it. Someone like Bill; someone like Fred Morrison, some person that rises up and shines. But the fact is God's glory is in the least person. Sure, there are celebrities, so-called stars, but that's not what this is about. Celebrities are about who *they* are; whatever light they may seem to have comes from us, from *our* paying attention to *them*.

But when God's glory shines out from someone, we don't so much see that person, we see who God is, who we were meant to be. The more we seek to be in God's presence, the greater chance that glory has to shine from us.

There's a praise song in our little blue hymnals, called Shine, Jesus, Shine (number 2173). Its third verse reads, "As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness; ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here may our lives tell your story. Shine on me, shine on me."

As Paul says, "And so we are transfigured much like Christ, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him." The closer we are to God, the more we make ourselves aware of his presence, the more we will be able to see him in others. And then, the world is transfigured for us – we see it differently. Christ forever changed the way his followers see reality: we see the world through the cross. We are unveiled: we see God in others, God in us shines out.