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February 11, 2018 – Transfiguration Sunday

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, 4:1-6

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. <sup>13</sup> We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.

*Present Weakness and Resurrection Life*

**4** Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”<sup>[a]</sup> made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

**Footnotes:**

- a. 2 Corinthians 4:6 Gen. 1:3

I don’t think I’m alone when I say I think respect for authority is something that is disappearing in this country. President Trump is seeing a fair bit of this right now, but he isn’t really alone there. President Obama got quite a bit of it too, as did President Clinton and President Bush before him. A president is always going to have vocal opponents, but it’s one thing to criticize a president’s actions or policies and another thing to directly insult the man himself. That’s the sort of thing that seems to be on the rise over the last couple of decades.

It certainly isn’t confined to just the presidency either. Police, teachers, and parents as a whole are all bearing the brunt of this as well. Parents and kids don’t respect teachers. Parents think teachers are incompetent and kids think they are powerless to enforce anything. Policemen are assumed to be corrupt or used to throwing their weight around. Kids don’t respect parents either. Kids get their way despite what parents want or say. The whole country fosters a universal disrespect of authority.

This is especially shameful in regards to Christ. As we heard a couple of weeks ago, Jesus demonstrates his authority, his singular authority that the whole world must respond to. He preached, he healed, he lived out the love of God. Some responded, but many did not. They rejected Jesus and his authority and went on with their lives without him.

But before Jesus comes around, the Israelites have their own encounter with God. God brought them through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai. Here he would give them his laws. God told Moses to tell the people to consecrate themselves to prepare for his arrival. God then came down to Mt. Sinai in dark clouds, lightning, and fire. The people were scared and told Moses they didn't want to hear God's voice anymore. They wanted him to be the go-between so God wouldn't speak to them anymore. God went along with their request, so Moses alone goes up the mountain to receive the law from God directly.

Moses spends a lot of time there speaking to God. When God is done speaking to Moses, Moses re-enters the camp. Everyone around knows he has been speaking with God, because his face shines with a bright light, which makes him hard to look at. The people suggest he wear a veil to shade the light.

In both cases the Israelites are making a prudent request. They don't need to go up on the mountain into the lightning and fire. They don't need to be blinded by Moses's shining face. Their request solves the problem. They want to respect God and his power and authority. They don't want to intrude in his domain or have him demean himself by seeing them in their lives. Better a separation. Better God stays over there where he can be pure and holy, where common things and common people know to stay away. Better to cover the light so they don't have a constant reminder of their unworthiness, where God is debasing himself to travel with these people.

This is the kind of behavior God should be encouraging. This is the kind of respect God keeps trying to instill in the people. Yet it never comes off as the right answer. Something about it just seems wrong. In our minds, it sounds like they should have done things differently. God calls to them from the mountain, why wouldn't you want to go up to see him? God speaks to Moses, wouldn't you be happy your leader was working directly with God to lead you? Wouldn't that make you feel safer?

Instead, they always want to keep God at arm's length. It actually makes sense when you think about it. It's easy to disrespect authority from a distance, but people usually shape up when they're in trouble and the authorities are there. You know this if you've ever been out driving a little faster than you're supposed to and suddenly realize you blew past a speed trap. Respect for authority quickly becomes a very real thing.

When you know the authorities can, and probably will, punish you for something you

know you did, disrespect becomes the last thing on your mind, at least if you don't want to make things worse. Sitting at the foot of the mountain, hearing God's voice in the thunder and fire suddenly made the power of God very real. They had seen God's power before, in Egypt, with the plagues that rained down on the Egyptians. But there all of the fury was going around them. It wasn't directed at them at all. God specifically exempted them from it. Now God was calling them to encounter it themselves and they weren't so sure anymore. Moses with his shining face was a constant reminder of God's presence in their lives, which wasn't always something they wanted at this point. Now that they had escaped from slavery they were becoming a lot more rebellious and disrespectful.

Being flippant and disrespectful is something each of us is familiar with too. There are all of those little things that come up, those little opportunities and you think to yourself, "I probably shouldn't do this, but it's no big deal." The little bit of gossip you just have to hear about. The little lie you tell that lets you get away with something your company doesn't allow. That little bit of resentment you harbor because you don't feel inclined to let go of the slight. That bit of snarkiness you let yourself have when talking to someone who is bothering you. It's not like you'll see them again and they should know they're being a nuisance. Those angry words you let slip when you fed up with the day and you need someone to let it out on, even if they had nothing to do with it.

These are all the times we want the veil there. We don't want the authorities to catch us. We want to be safely hidden out of sight. We don't even want any reminders that the authorities are around. We don't want anything that points out our failures and suggests there may be penalties for what we are doing. Remember the veil wasn't there for Moses. It was there for everyone else.

St. Paul talks about Moses and the veil. He talks about renouncing disgraceful, underhanded ways. It's something we'd like to do, but every time we think about putting away some of those little things we know we shouldn't be doing we find ourselves putting our nose right back in it. "It's no big deal," we say. "It's not hurting anyone, or at least not anyone important." But we secretly hope the authorities aren't watching, because we know what we're doing is wrong. We don't want to see it. We don't want to know about it. We just want to keep on doing what we're doing. We don't respect the authorities for their own sake. We only care about whether they will punish us. Whether they're going to see what we've been up to all

along.

St. Paul says when the Israelites read the old covenant the veil is still there. They understand laws, disobedience, and punishment just like we do. They know what happens when you break the law and the authorities catch you. They don't need to be told about it further. We still understand how the laws work. We still have little use or interest in authorities unless they're coming after us to administer punishment.

It sounds a bit like what's going on on the mountaintop as Jesus reveals his glory and the disciples fall down terrified and babbling. All this time the disciples have been able to get by thinking the authorities aren't coming after them. Out of sight, out of mind, as they say. But now they see that isn't possible. Big Brother has been watching them all along. They can't get away from God's oversight.

Who wants the authorities around? Who wants to live in fear of punishment? We know we deserve punishment every time we break the law. You might escape punishment from the laws you break here if the police don't catch you. But God is always watching. There is no avoiding it.

We find these texts on Transfiguration Sunday. St. Paul says the veil is still there for those who do not believe and only through Christ is it taken away. St. Paul doesn't fear seeing Christ in his glory, despite the many sins he has committed and the terrible punishments he deserves.

God reveals himself to his people, not to condemn them for their sins but to bring them out of those sins. We fear punishment and the authorities that bring it, and rightly so. Christ comes to tell us the punishment has been taken away, that he has already paid it. If God were to reveal his glory to you and you were not fit to be in his presence, the punishment would be swift and terrible. Instead God reveals himself to assure you he is here for you, not to condemn but to save. God is the ultimate authority. Christ holds authority over everything in heaven and earth, but he wants to be with you and would rather pay the punishment himself if it means you don't end up incarcerated for your many sins. He doesn't want you to be afraid of him. He wants you to feel safe with him. He drops the veil away and shows you that the penalty for your sins has been paid so you have nothing to fear from him anymore. He is not Big Brother watching for any little infraction. He is your brother here to protect you.

He is here again today. The bread and wine are transfigured, Christ revealing himself to

you to tell you you are forgiven, the penalty has been paid. As Paul says, the light of Christ shines in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God. Jesus has shared his work with you, the truth of his mercy.

Now this ministry is yours as well. You who have seen Christ without the veil can now proclaim what you have seen. We rejoice in the truth. We do not run in fear of a God who comes bringing punishment. We share our lives with him because there is no punishment anymore.