

FIRST LESSON: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6
SECOND LESSON: Mark 9:2-9
February 14, 2021

“God Revealed”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Since it is Valentine’s Day I thought I would begin my sermon today with a few reflections on love. But I don’t want to bore you with MY ideas, I thought I would go to the experts—kids.

Eight-year-old Emily says, “Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss.”

Rebecca, also age eight said, “When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.”

Mark, age 6 is a brutal realist. He says, “Love is when Mommy sees Daddy on the toilet and she doesn't think it's gross.”

Bobby age 7 says, “Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.”

But my all-time favorite comes from Billy, age 4. “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.”

How do we really know what love is? We have to experience it. There is no other way. And there is no other way to know what faith is outside of experiencing the God who is perfect love. God has revealed God’s self in Christ. We can see the nature of God in a human life. But most days it looks like people aren’t even paying attention. They’re not interested in finding God. God will get in the way. God will cramp their style.

One of the things that puzzles people of faith is why some people wake up spiritually and seek God, and others don’t. Why is it that some see God at work in the world and nature, and others see nothing? Why is it that some respond to God’s grace and love and others are oblivious to its existence? This is not new. The apostle Paul reflected upon it in 2 Corinthians, speaking of the gospel as being “veiled” to some. Perhaps a veil isn’t the best way to translate the word for us, however. We don’t tend to use veils in our society, and veils are flimsy things. The word means something that is covered over and concealed. In my parent’s house there are two blocked off and completely concealed fireplace entrances, places where once upon a time a free-standing coal stove would have been vented into the chimney. We found them in our house as well when we refinished the floors and discovered the small squares of replaced hardwood where the stoves had been. But in both houses they have been concealed, papered and painted over, disguised. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, you wouldn’t even realize they were there. It’s that kind of

concealed. Unless you're motivated what is there is completely hidden. The reason for our architectural blindness is just lack of knowledge, but the reason Paul gives for spiritual blindness is that "the god of this age" has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

One of the stranger stories in the New Testament is the story of the transfiguration. It is a story in which God is revealed in a way that CANNOT be mistaken. There is nothing concealed or subtle about the transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John with him on a journey up a high mountain. Once there he was transformed before them. His clothes became dazzling white, "whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them," we are told. And then "there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus." Peter made a suggestion that sounds strange to us. "Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was referring to was a prophetic tradition derived from Zechariah that the end times would come during the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the type of shelter he was talking about. Penn Wynne, among many other main line neighborhoods, has a large Orthodox Jewish population, so you will actually know what I am talking about. During Succoth (soo-keth) or the Feast of Tabernacles, held in the autumn, people erect temporary shelters for a week. This is to commemorate the sheltering of the Israelites in the wilderness. It wouldn't have been too far-fetched for Peter to think that all of these things had come together seeing Jesus, Elijah and Moses in the blinding light. For all we know it may have even been the right time of year. Peter was wrong, but it wasn't a foolish idea.

A cloud then appeared and covered them and a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" And after the cloud disappeared Jesus was left standing there alone with them, looking as he always did. It is a good thing there were three of them because one person alone would have concluded that he had lost his mind. Three together could confirm that it had in fact happened. But Jesus told them to say nothing about what had taken place until "the Son of Man had risen from the dead." And just think about how terrifying that instruction would have been!

Peter, James and John saw God revealed. Did they understand it? Of course not. What does a blindingly bright glowing figure mean? What does it mean that Elijah and Moses were there? We might have ideas. We can certainly speculate. Both Moses and Elijah were connected to the end times because according to 2 Kings 2:9-12 Elijah went physically into heaven and Moses' grave was never found. Allegedly he was buried by God in Deuteronomy 34:4-7. Because of their unique endings it was thought possible by many that these two men could be sent back to earth. But when it comes to the divine, we get glimpses, not building plans.

We always want proof. If God would just be clearer, we say, then everyone would believe. But would they? God can miraculously heal someone of cancer. One family member says it's a miracle. Another says it's an unexplained spontaneous remission. For those determined not to believe, no amount of evidence will do. But who or what is "the god of this age" that has blinded so many? We can be specific and say Satan, or we can be general, and say a worldly and selfish lifestyle. Really, it's both. As a society we're very good at producing self-centered people. And as long as people are wrapped up in

materialism or vanity or desire for power, they are not going to even be aware there is a God. While this may be an explanation for why people ignore faith and God, however, if these people fall within our circle of awareness, we can pray for them. We can free them from the influence of negative spiritual forces through prayer, and we can lovingly challenge them about their priorities in life.

God reveals God's self in various ways in history and in our individual lives. Peter, James and John quite literally had a mountaintop experience. I think I'm pretty safe in saying that that one was unique. Many of us have had other kinds of mountaintop spiritual experiences when we felt especially close to God and full of God's love. Mountaintop experiences are given to us in order to strengthen us through the tough times. The transfiguration was something the three disciples could hold on to and remember. It was a clear demonstration of who Jesus really was should they ever doubt. But Peter, James and John could not stay on the mountaintop forever, and neither can we. They had to go back down into the valley. There was work to be done. But they could carry the memory, even and especially in the hardest days of all when Jesus was crucified. They could hold on when nothing made sense at all.

I've been to the mountaintop and I've been to the valley. Most of the time I'm just trudging along through the smaller ups and downs of life, but through it all God is still there. My awareness of God may change, but the reality of God's presence and love does not. As four-year-old Billy put it, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth." No matter what is happening in our lives, from the heights to the depths, our names are safe in God's mouth. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ 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. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," 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.

Mark 9:2-9

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.