

“Do Not Lose Heart”

2 Corinthians 3:16-4:2 & Luke 9:28-36

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Prayer for Understanding Great and good God, give us pure hearts that we may see you, humble hearts that we may hear you, hearts of love that we may serve you, hearts of faith that we may live in you, reverent hearts that we may worship you, here and in the world out there. Amen.

We live in a fatiguing world. We journey through a myriad of pain, struggle, heartache, grief, and shattered dreams. Our scripture today proclaims, “do not lose heart,” “never give up,” “do not get discouraged” and in Roderick’s favorite translation, the King James Version, “we faint not.”

Today is transfiguration Sunday when we try to put into words the mystery of God’s glory that, shines upon us, gives us epiphany moments, and causes us to shine. Transfiguration Sunday invites us to wrestle with our reality of a living a difficult life in a fallen world and the glory of God graciously given.

Moses found himself in the presence of God, and the glory of God was so astonishingly brilliant that his eyes could not deal with it. Moses protected his face with a veil. The experience of Moses is a check on imagination that pictures God as someone who looks like a human. We tend to fashion God in our own image, to demystify God, to put God in a body, to try to explain who God is and to discern God’s will for our lives. God is far more glorious than our ability to perceive and communicate. It is beneficial to try to explain who God is and to try to discern God’s will for our life as long as we remember that all our attempts are incomplete and fall woefully short. Listening to each other, listening to everyone, listening to tradition, listening to new insights expand our minuscule perception of God.

Our scriptures today remind us that God, the Creator, does not have a body. God is an intense vortex of energy and fire. The Ground of All Being. God is a howling wind, the voice in a burning bush, the Creator of all that is and ever will be. God is eternal, indescribable, transcendent. God is I am, sheer silence, the source of life, the power of the cosmos, pure radiance.

God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, is our three best friends. At times, it is good and helpful to think of God, as Redeemer, Jesus, God in human flesh, at times walking with us and at times carrying us. And it is good and helpful to think of God as a cosmic ball of energy so immense, bright, and glorious that we can only be in God’s presence with a veil to protect us.

Even with a veil after Moses left the presence of God, he needed to veil his face because the brilliance of God caused him to shine so much that Moses was blinding to those who looked upon him. It was this experience of God, this epiphany, this transfiguration, which enabled Moses to lead the people, to never give up on them, to not faint, to not lose heart. We are invited to be like Moses, to experience God, to shine, to reveal God’s glory, to inspire others.

For most of us, we are on the other end of the veil spectrum. There are a few who need a veil to protect themselves from God’s glory. Most of us have a veil so thick we struggle to perceive God. The Apostle Paul wrote: **2 Corinthians 3:16-4:2 NLT “But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So, all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like God as we are changed into God’s glorious image. Therefore, since God in God’s mercy has given us this new way, we never give up. We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don’t try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this.”**

Moses used a physical veil. The Apostle Paul is describing metaphoric veils. Veils of fear or hate that hardens hearts. Veils of scarcity that try to limit God’s love. Veils of judgement that attempt to restrict God’s grace. Veils of anxiety that distort God’s peace. Veils of skepticism that restrict the flow of God’s joy. Veils of busyness that ignore God. Veils of self-sufficiency that deny God. Veils of systems, institutions and law that fail to help us love God, love each other, and love ourselves. Most of us see in a mirror dimly. Most of us go through life in a dense fog missing the beauty, missing God’s “love you notes” that are all around us and in us. God is all about unveiling.

Unveiling sets us free to follow the intent of the law, to love God, love others and love ourself without the judgements and imprisonment of the law. We are saved, redeemed, transformed, made glorious, by God’s grace. When we “get” this, or you might say when we are transfigured by this, we see more of God’s glory, and we shine

with God's glory. The more of God's grace we perceive the more gracious we become. The more of God's joy, peace, love we perceive the more joyous, peaceful, and loving we become.

Listen again to the Apostle Paul this time from the Message translation. **2 Corinthians 3:16-4:2** **"Whenever we turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there we are—face-to-face! We suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We are free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of God's face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like God. Since God has so generously let us in on what God is doing, we are not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God."**

There is a story of an expert violin maker who had the reputation for making exceptional instruments. One apprentice was skillful in every way but one: he didn't have a good eye for wood. It was hard for him to learn how to select the tree in the forest from which the violin would come. So, the expert took the apprentice out into the forest in the dead of winter. Snow was swirling all around and icicles hung from the tree-branches. They walked to the north, and the expert started marking the trees. "Why?" the apprentice asked. "Why these trees?" "These face due north," the expert replied. "They take the brunt of the wind, the chill and the ice. Their wood is strong, as a result. They make marvelous violins." The apprentice replied, "Doesn't it bother you to think about the trees that you marked standing alone in the wind, against all this ice and fury? Have you no pity for them?" The expert smiled. "No, not at all. You see, they are being tuned!" That is how transformation "from one degree of glory to another" happens, in this life. It is not always a pleasant process, nor a comfortable one. Yet, we have from the Scriptures this promise: the Master Carpenter is active in our lives, forming us into the instrument that will most movingly sing God's praises.

Monk Jeremy Driscoll writes, "Fortunately, God is not what we think God is — not in any small way what I might think, nor in any big way the sum total of what a whole bunch of thinkers, great thinkers through the centuries, might think. And yet we have no choice but to try to think what God is, what and who God might be. At some point God comes to meet such thoughts. God arrives and appears as Surprise. Our efforts at thought are God's foil. Shaken off, God's mystery shines. And something new is grasped in the surprise; something is learned; experience — it could be called experience with God — is gained. And God remains infinitely free, infinitely out of our control in whatever we come to know."

Scottish pastor John Philip Newell writes of the high desert. "I breathe deeply. I inhale the soul of creation in these landscapes I am alive to its oneness. It is the 'fragrance' of the Feminine deep within the body of the earth, that quality within matter that awakens my desire for union."

Thomas Merton wrote: "In Louisville at the corner of Fourth and Walnut I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs—it was like waking from a dream of separateness . . . to take your place as a member of the human race. I had the immense joy of being human—a member of the race in which God became incarnate. If only everybody could realize this. But it cannot be explained—there is no way of telling people that they are all walking round shining like the sun."

Thomas Berry said, "Moments of grace are transient moments. They often transcend time and space. They cannot be explained and require a different way of knowing than through the intellect. They may only happen once or twice in a person's lifetime or maybe not at all. If we don't have such mystical moments, it is not a sign that we are unfaithful. If we do have them, it is no reason for pride. God's Spirit is free and wild and cannot be captured or contained."

Luke 9:28-36 NLT **"Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. And as Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But even as Peter was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them. Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen."**

The veil was removed from Peter, James, and John. They saw a snippet of God's glory diffused through Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. It was a mystical, mysterious, indescribable, experience for them. Afterwards they stumbled down the mountain and told no one. We are unable to explain God. When one tries it does not come out right and one sounds and feels foolish. I hope you have had transfiguration experiences, moments of unexplainable love, joy, peace, and wonder. Moments when all was well with you. Moments when you felt fully connected to another. Moments when you seemed to be in sync with the cosmos. Moments when creativity flowed through you. Moments when you performed tasks with ease. Moments when you felt like you were soaring. A moment that was so glorious that you wanted it to last, to build a shelter, to stay and savor the moment. A moment that transfigured you, transformed you and you are unable to explain. Some of these moments are grand mystical experiences of God. Some of the moments are sensual, a taste, a smell, a sight, a sound, a touch. Some are a flood of emotion. Some are unique delivered by God specifically for you. Some take one outside of themselves to dimensions of life beyond our sense of touch, sight, and hearing.

Since the Enlightenment, we have been relying more and more on objective evidence, what we can see, taste, feel, observe, and analyze. Our knowledge is developed from human reason, facts, and common sense. And so when it comes to Bible stories, like the transfiguration, we have trouble. There are other ways of knowing that are beyond human reason.

Moses expected to experience God on the mountain. Moses sat in silence for six days. Pastor John Buchanan preached, "Sometimes sitting in silence is the best we can do. Sometimes chattering doesn't do much. Sometimes pressing for answers and explanations trivializes the experience. When you sit at the bedside of a dear one, who is critically ill, sometimes silence is more profound than talk. When you are privileged to share with another the facing of the final mystery silence is often preferred instead of rational explanations of what is happening.

I strive to learn from and be respectful of everyone's perceptions of God. However, I do become concerned when someone is absolutely certain they know the will of God on a myriad of issues. I am troubled when someone is certain they know the will of God for another person. Where is the mystery, awe, and wonder? Where is the silence and feeble attempts to explain their experience of God? Where is their transfiguration? God is God. We are not God. No one fully knows God. God is not limited by the boundaries of human understanding. Sometimes when everything makes sense it is because one's perception of God is too small.

In the midst of Peter, James, and John's transfiguration moment they heard a voice say, "Listen." We are invited to do much more than listen with our ears. We are invited to mind's eye listen, soul listen, intuitive listen, empathy listening to the true self behind the veil of others and listen in ways that we cannot describe.

Father Edward Foley said, "One of the things religion tries to do is ask, 'How do we combine seemingly contradictory, at least paradoxical elements, like living and dying, darkness and light, or birth and death, and put them in some kind of constellation which, if they cannot be explained, at least urge us on and give us hope.'"

The writings of the Apostle Paul are full of run on sentences, metaphors, and swirling trains of thought. I sense his struggle to explain the mystery of God, the glory, the good news of God's redeeming grace for all people. I perceive only two themes of which Paul writes with certainty, "Love endures forever," and "Nothing can separate anyone from God's love." Love reveals a reality bigger than our reality and in that bigger reality we discover meaning and purpose.

In today's scripture Paul is struggling to explain how God's eternal enduring love for everyone, sustains everyone. People do give up, and lose heart, and get discouraged and faint. Even when we do God's mystery envelopes us, draws us to resurrection, washes us clean, molds us into goodness, completes our giftedness. How and when is a mystery.

Peter, James, and John had an amazing mountaintop experience with God, a radiant transfiguration moment. And each of them gave up on Jesus. They betrayed Jesus. They got discouraged. They fainted. They lost heart. They denied Jesus. They coward behind locked doors. They were paralyzed with fear. And, that transfiguration moment somehow got them through all of that to forgiveness, renewed friendship with Jesus, peace, joy, love, to discipleship, to shining with God's glory, to sharing the good news of God with multitudes, with us. How and what is a mystery. It is enough to know that God will get us through everything to abundant, eternal life. So never give up, do not get discouraged, do not lose heart, do not faint. The Lord will renew your strength. You will mount up with wings like eagles. You will walk and not be weary. You will run and not be faint. Amen