

Unveiled Ministry

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6

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The God who said: “let light shine out of darkness” now shine in your hearts to reveal the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Amen.

2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³ unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

⁴ ¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. ³ But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For it is the God who commanded light to 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.

In Jesus name,

The current state of politics and journalism often leaves one wondering: “What is really going on?” We want to know what is going on, so we turn on our favorite news outlet. And the news we turn to is filled with controversy, arguments, and suspicions about what is really going on. The latest “Nunes Memo” is just another example of this turmoil. The recently released Nunes Memo calls into question the integrity of the FBI and the Justice Department at the time of the 2016 presidential elections. The memo claims that the FBI and Justice Department both ignored, suppressed, concealed, and omitted important information which led to the secret surveillance of the Trump campaign. The memo shows that the Democratic party and the Clinton campaign were involved in the gathering of evidence which led to the approval of our justice department

for the FBI to surveil the Trump campaign. In other words, the real story of what led to the investigation of the Trump campaign has been veiled in politics.

But as we turn on the news, we find that this isn't really the story. The real story is not about the unveiling the workings of our government and the truth of what happened. Rather, like virtually every politically charged topic these days, it is about which side you are on. Are you pro-Trump, or anti-Trump? And which side you are on becomes more important than what really is going on. Dating back to the election campaign in 2016, the story has been about which side you are on. So you have two sides going to bat: either those spinning a story to make Trump look like the good guy, the hero, the champion for the people—or those spinning a narrative to make Trump look like a creep, a traitor, a racist. But the search is not for truth; it is a search to find out which side you are on. It is not about truth and justice, but power. Veiled politics.

This is our reality check. Because it is crucial that we know what is going on. Not just in our government—we might never really know what is going on there. But in our lives and in our congregation and in our hearts. Without the work of God's Spirit on our hearts, we would forever be blinded by "the god of this age." We would be caught up in struggles for power; taking sides and spinning stories.

The Epiphany season culminates in this theme: transfiguration. An unveiling of who God really is by unveiling who Christ really is. God unveils His beloved Son for us to see and to know so that we might know the truth of it all. That is why our ministry here at Holy Trinity is unlike the politics in Washington. It is all about transparency. From the Word which is interpreted, to the Word that is received, to the Word that is handled and taught, to the Word that is preached and which forms the basis of our worship: God unveils Himself in this ministry.

We'll take this in four parts as we work through the text. First, the Scriptures are unveiled; second, our hearts are unveiled; third, our confession of the truth is unveiled; fourth, our preaching is unveiled.

1. Unveiled Scripture

Firstly, the Scriptures are unveiled by looking to Christ, not by looking to Moses.

"Don't stare at the sun or you'll go blind," mom says. Maybe you can remember your parents teaching you something like this. Even during the eclipse this last year, just a sliver of the sun required that we wear those thick special sunglasses. Now imagine standing before the presence of God. Just a sliver of His glory would blind us.

When Moses came back from meeting with the Lord on Mount Sinai, he brought back a sliver of that glory. And when the people saw him, they were terrified. For God is a consuming fire. He is so holy and far apart from our sinful state that this glory reflected in Moses was scary. So Moses had to wear a veil over his face so as to be able to speak to the people. God's glory was

that great. To be that close to God, only reminded the people of how far they were from Him. This is what the Law was meant to do. To teach the people that the glory of God is not something that we can achieve or reach by our own reasoning or effort. Instead, God must be merciful. He must grant us forgiveness in order for us to stand in His presence.

But this was forgotten. And as the years rolled on and the generations passed on, the people grew dull and forgetful. They began reading the Old Testament as if it were also veiled, so that they could not see its meaning. The teachings of the Law were interpreted as a means to achieve God's glory, rather than His glory something hidden, concealed which could only be uncovered in His grace and mercy.

By the time Christ came along, all they were concerned about was the Law; not the promises. All they saw were rules and legal requirements. They were more concerned about taking sides and maintaining their political power than they were about taking God's side and maintaining the truth. They had thrown a veil over the Law so as to make it more doable, and no longer did the glory of God terrify them; nor could they see the true glory of God when it was standing right before them in the flesh of the Nazarene.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

Christ stood on that Mountain shining forth and unveiled to show the apostles the unveiled truth of it all. This reveals to us also, that the glory of God is not in Moses and the Law, but in Christ who is God's Son. It is a bit of a paradox. The glory of God is unveiled in the veiled flesh of Jesus Christ. Jesus came down from that mountain and put on the veil. God's glory was hidden in the suffering and death of the cross. But this also unveiled the Scriptures and the Law, so we can see the true goal and purpose of all the Scriptures. They all point to the need for a Savior and show that the Word can only be understood through the Gospel of Christ.

“The veil is taken away in Christ.”

2. Unveiled Hearts

As that veil is lifted, there is also a veil that God lifts from our hearts. The second part of our unveiled ministry is for God to send us His Spirit and unveil our blind hearts so we can see the truth of it all.

By nature we prefer the law. Now that might not seem readily apparent since we would rather disobey the law and do it all the time. But that is not exactly what we are talking about. The Law in its unveiled form is terrifying and condemning and in all its fullness; we must ask Moses

to put the veil back on. What we really prefer is a veiled Law; the sort of commandments we can handle; something easier. We prefer what Paul calls, “the letter of the Law.”

The letter of the law is not identical with the Law with a capital “L.” The letter of the Law is the sort of principle our government abides by. For instance, if you should get pulled over for running a red light—is the officer going to say, “what were you thinking?” Or “why did you do that?” Or “you better have a good explanation.” Maybe you didn’t do it on purpose. Maybe you were late for an important appointment. Maybe you saw someone else do it right in the lane next to you. But he most likely will not care about excuses or what was going on in your heart.

The letter of the law deals only with the outward action. The written letter. And we need this when it comes to government. We want our government to be bound to the letter of the constitution. But when it comes to the Word of God and our dealings with each other, it cannot be according to the letter of the law. If we read the first commandment only according to the letter of the law, then we might have a good case to claim innocence. After all, the letter of the law simply says, don’t make any idols and don’t worship them. Do any of you have idols in your house? But that is not the truth. That is a veiled reading of the law.

15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Sometimes we get caught up in trying to take sides. Debates about doctrine, about fellowship, about marriage, about sin, about the law—we so easily are drawn to the letter. What does the letter say? What are the rules? What about the “do’s” and “don’ts.” When it comes to doctrine we can easily get carried away with being so focused on making sure we dot the i’s and cross the t’s that we lose sight of the person that we are talking to & the cross that really matters. When discussing fellowship practices, prayer fellowship, closed communion, and so on, we talk more about “do’s” and “don’t” and less about “why” and “why not.” So our ministry becomes veiled.

“Now where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Now don’t be mistaken. This is not an invitation to throw out the law and say, well “I have liberty.” It is a call to let the Spirit rule and not be taken captive by the letter of the law. In other words, the first commandment is not only about not crafting a statue of God and bowing down to it—it is about faith. Where is your heart? What are you turning to for help and blessing? Why are you more concerned about your finances or health or future or personal happiness or self-image than you are about God? Why are you trying to get people to take sides?

The Spirit of liberty means that we are free from the letter. We are on God’s side, which means we are on your side and the side that matter is truth not Trump. The goal is to behold the glory of the Lord: to see on that Mountain, an unveiled Savior; and although He owned the glory to be called God’s Son, He came down and hid it away in His humility and suffering. The glory of

God then comes forth from the grave in His resurrection and we behold it; look at it this way and that to see that He is our Lord and not the letter.

We are free from guilt and judgment. So it is not about waiting for your pastor to tell you what to do and not to do—but to behold the glory of God and reflect that glory which is found in Christ—reflect it before the world. We are being transfigured from one degree of glory into another. And that is an ongoing receiving of the Spirit; to receive the Holy Spirit and see beyond the letter to why God matters and to see His character and then see the people around you and what they need from you. This is unveiled doctrine. This is unveiled teaching. This is the Spirit of liberty leading us to love and to speak the truth in love. This is God lifting the veil from your hearts.

3. Unveiled Confession

There is a difference between saying what is true and telling the truth. We see it all the time. We see it when a political group supplies evidence to the FBI to investigate the other side, but they won't say where it came from. It is like the Trump Dossier which gives good reason for the FBI to want to investigate Carter Page for his relationship with the Russians, but does nothing to supply the motivation for that accusation. What it says is true, but it does not tell the truth.

This is like a high school student asking mom and dad if he can go to a sleep over on Friday night at a friend's house. "Sure" they say. But what he doesn't mention is that his friend's parents are out of town that weekend and there will be no adult supervision. When he comes home the next day looking like death—they say, how was the sleep over? "Good. I'm tired." And he goes to his room to sleep it off. There is a difference between saying what is true and telling the truth.

¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.

² But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Our conscience needs the truth of it all. And even where the truth cannot be fully known, what we do know and see needs to be trustworthy. We need to know that those who are talking to us; those leading us; or those teaching us are trustworthy. And there is a difference between saying what is true and telling the truth.

The same is true of any church denomination which will not take a stand on the clear word of God. Whether its the topic of homosexuality or evolution or the teaching of the virgin birth of Christ—our conscience requires that we know what is really is going on. A truth veiled in compromise is no truth at all.

The phrase "handling the word of God deceitfully" could be better translated as "not distorting the Word of God." In other words, it is not that we are as likely to completely lie about the word;

but what happens is that churches begin to distort the Word. That is, they say what is true, but don't tell the truth. Or they say what is true, but they tolerate what is not true along side it. Its like inviting your fellow Christians over to a friends house, but not mentioning that the devil will be supervising.

In the book of Romans, Paul writes: "Be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil" (Romans 16). When we confess the truth, we do it clearly, with few and simple words. And when we reject what is false and dangerous, we do so clearly, without delay. So we hold to a written confession: such as the Book of Concord or the Apostles Creed. This is not to say that the written words on the paper are what matter—what matters is the heart and faith that lay behind them and which are lived out in front of them. The confession matters, because in this we say clearly to all the world and especially to the consciences listening: we believe in a physical six day creation with a real historical Adam and an Eve that really took that real fruit and really sinned. And we believe in Jesus Christ, that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

This is an unveiled ministry.

4. Unveiled Preaching

The last part of our unveiled ministry is to be sure that our preaching is unveiled. By preaching I mean all that gets proclaimed in our worship service. Preaching is not just what the pastor says for 20 minutes in the pulpit. It is the hymns we sing; the Scriptures we read; the confession we make; the back and forth liturgy that we recite. Basically, everything that we are saying in our liturgy and worship is part of our preaching. The goal is that nothing we do or say or listen to in the presence of God veils or distracts us from seeing our Lord Jesus Christ.

This can happen in one of two ways. On the one hand, the worship service becomes veiled when "the smells and bells" become so prevalent that we no longer know what the word is saying. This is where too many traditions lead us away from the central teaching of the word. For instance, at one time the liturgy was all performed in Latin; but the problem was, very few common people knew Latin. We should never cling to the traditions: the gestures we use, the way we dress; the symbols we show—if it means Christ is being veiled.

On the other hand, the worship service can also become veiled when it is stripped so bare of all traditions and symbolism that there is no Christ left, only the pastor. This happens when the worship service is more about the showman than about showing Christ. It is a sort of billboard Christianity. You see it in advertising; on the cover of Christian books and on posters in Christian book stores. This is the sparkling, shiny smile of Joel Osteen. What happens is that our our attention becomes drawn more to the person and the performance of the celebrity than the person and the performance of Christ. The trendy clothing, the Vegas-like light-show, the exciting music, the comedic performance—it is all very attractive and appealing, but it conceals what should be the centerpiece of our worship.

4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to 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.

The question you should be asking yourself when you come to church is, where is Jesus. Did you see him? Can you see his face? Paul is using the sort of language that the Corinthians would be familiar with. Many of them would remember what it was like to practice paganism and to worship before the face of an idol. The most important part of the idol is the face and in paganism, in order to receive blessing from the god, you must be able to see the face of the idol and the face of the idol must be able to see you.

But for us, the face we are able to see and come before is Jesus. His face shines forth the glory of God. That is to say, the proclamation of His work for us on the cross, His presence in your baptism, His voice in the Word and His appearance in the Lord's Supper, are all the shining, unveiled proclamation of God's glory. Unlike Moses, however, this is a glory we can behold face to face. The humanity and glorified victory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is transfigured before us in the liturgy for us to see Him by faith. That is unveiled preaching.

So, you can say what you want about politics. And that is just the way it is. We may never know the truth. Much of journalism and politics has become veiled in partisan maneuvers and a struggle to maintain power. So stories will be spun this way and that way. You'll be given a binary choice: are you for or against. And there may be little we can do, because so much of America has forfeited the Truth for the little truths that the god of this age has used to blind them.

But not here. Not in the church. Not in the place where the Truth makes the difference between heaven and hell. So when it comes to Scripture; when it comes to our heart; when it comes to our confession; when it comes to our preaching and liturgy—this is an unveiled ministry where the God who said: “Let light shine out of darkness” is now shining forth into our hearts to give His glory to us in the shining presence of Jesus Christ. Shine forth, O Lord. Amen.