

## **“Lifting our Veils”**

**Transfiguration Sunday - 14/2/10**

### **Readings:**

**Exodus 34: 29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2, Luke 9:28-36**

**God of glory and majesty, bathe us in the bright fire of your transforming love. Gift us with the Spirit that we may live boldly each day so that the bright light of your love for the world might shine through us. AMEN.**

On the wall of my study at home there hangs a poster. And like it's owner it seen better days, but I've carried it with me, battered and creased, though it is, for over 30 years. There are words on that poster, penned by the great pioneer of family therapy, Virginia Satir. It's a poem called "The Five Freedoms" listen to it now:

***To see and hear what is here***

***instead of what should be, was, or will be.***

***To say what one feels and thinks***

***instead of what one should.***

***To feel what one feels***

***instead of what one ought.***

***To ask what one wants***

***instead of always waiting for permission.***

***To take risks on one's own behalf***

***instead of choosing to be only "secure" and not rocking the boat.***

I share these words with you this morning partly because I believe failure to live by such freedoms are at the heart of most of the problems our world faces today, individually, in families, and in our churches. We are fearful of what others might think of us and so choose not to see what is before our eyes and to hear what is being said to us. We are taught not to feel, and free thinking is often frowned upon. In a conversation with a young woman from Malaysia on the bus to the airport on Friday I asked if she was a Christian. "No," she replied, "I'm a free thinker." For her Christianity was a religion of "shoulds" and "oughts," and a religion where thinking was strictly policed. Now from where did this young woman get that idea? Especially since Jesus, we say, came to make us free. Perhaps its because she is looking for people in her life who live their lives authentically and not behind the masks or veils. People who are free to: "To see and hear what is here instead of what should be, was, or will be. To say what one feels and thinks instead of what one should. To feel what one feels instead of what one ought. To ask what one wants instead of always waiting for permission. To take risks on one's own behalf instead of choosing to be only "secure" and not rocking the boat."

Well perhaps all three of our readings this morning can shed some light on the subject. Moses, places a veil over his face to shield the Israelites from the glory of the Lord. This religious stuff is too much for the man and woman in the street. It needs to be watered down. That's why Moses takes the veil, a barrier between God and his people. Perhaps

that's why some still see the need to have priests and even ministers mediate between them and the glory of God. I wonder if that was not what Jesus was reacting to in his attacks on the religion of his day. I wonder if that was not why the young Malaysian woman preferred to be known as a free thinker rather than belong to any faith.

And the veils we put on do not only hide the glory of God from us, they also separate us from each other. We hide behind our veils, unwilling to show others who we truly are for fear rejection. We hide behind our veils to hide ourselves from God also for fear of rejection. But Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church claims that with the arrival of Jesus the Christ there is no need for the veil. In Jesus we can see the full glory of God and far from needing to be protected from it, Paul would have us embrace the Christ in Jesus and absorb the Christ into our own living. No veils for Paul. For him Jesus came to blow away all that would separate and divide humanity from God, all that would separate and divide individual from individual, all that would separate humanity from the very planet we inhabit. Jesus came to bring wholeness, to help us see our interrelatedness with the whole of God's creation. So why would we need a veil for that!

Eight days after Jesus has indicated to his disciples the road he must travel to Jerusalem, when he invites them to follow, to lose their lives in order to save them, he takes three of them up a mountain. From evidence in all the gospels its highly unlikely that they understood what Jesus was saying, so look on this mountain excursion as an advanced class for Peter John and James. A lesson where the veils will well and truly be off, despite Jesus' face and clothes becoming dazzlingly white.

On the mountain the disciples encounter two others, similarly covered in the glory of God. They are chatting, talking about the very thing thing that Jesus had tried to impart to the disciples eight day prior - Jesus' "departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." This is to be God's glory. - Jesus the truly Human One willing to lose his life so that the lesson of dying to self might be fully understood.

But Peter half asleep behind his veil of self protection misunderstands. God's glory needs to be separate. On a mountain, in a building, so he asks to build three stone cairns - dwellings for God's glory. You see what's happening, the freedom of the gospel, being fettered, placed behind a veil.

So as if to underscore the lesson, a cloud overshadows them, not full of light this time - but none the less full of God's glory and out of the cloud comes the word - "This is my Son, the Chosen; LISTEN TO HIM!" You want to know about the glory of God, look to Jesus and his way of humiliation. God's glory is never about showy pyrotechnics and miracles - it is always about living the Christ life.

And the glory of God, the Christ life is one of authenticity. It's a life lived in humility. It's a life that choses to die to self and to live completely in connection to God and to others. A life lived without veils. So what would our lives look like if we dropped the veil, dropped the pretense, letting others know how we feel, saying clearly what we mean, listening with open ears to what others say to us. What would it mean for our family if the veils came off. What

would it mean for our church fellowship - speaking the truth in love is how it is described elsewhere in Scriptures.

But it is those word "in love' that are important. For it is there that the glory of God resides. And unless the love is there, then perhaps we should keep our veils on, because we won't know how to live with the glory of God. We would be like the disciples - half asleep, looking for God in all the wrong places.

The coming of Jesus, the beloved Son, the Chosen, has taught us that the glory of God resides in each one of us. The Christ is there within each one of us and can only be seen by each one of us, through unveiled faces. Unveiled faces free of prejudice, free of feelings of superiority, free of oughts and shoulds that we have for the other. God's glory is to be found in the unconditional love that he would gift each of one of us. So why not remove the veils from our faces and accept God's unconditional love so that it can shine from our faces and so change the world.

Or to use the words of the 14th Century Sufi poet, Hafiz,  
We should make all spiritual talk  
Simple today:  
God is trying to sell us something,  
But we don't want to buy.  
That's what suffering is:  
Our fantastic haggling,  
Our manic screaming over the price!

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