



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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MARCH 3, 2019
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Lifting the Veil Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Veils have long been used throughout the world. In ancient times, a veil was believed to help ward off evil spirits and also used to indicate the social status of a woman. For males in some parts of the world, a veil is indication of manhood. Veils are still used in our country—mostly at weddings, sometimes at funerals. It is essentially a symbol of modesty or propriety. For the blushing bride, it is a symbol of complete openness at the moment of making vows and giving pledges. For the grieving widow, it is a slight bit of privacy in a very public acknowledgment of grief. Veils are still used in some cultures where it is seen as immodest and inappropriate for anything but a woman's eyes to be seen by a man other than her husband. In those instances, most of us would see the veil as a symbol of repression rather than modesty.

The Bible is rife with examples of veils. The most famous instance is that occasion when Jacob, on the run from cheating his brother and father, found his way to his Uncle Laban's home in Haran. There he met Rachel, the beautiful younger daughter of Laban. Immediately love-struck, Jacob offered to work for his uncle seven years in order to marry Rachel. Laban agreed and when the wedding finally took place with joy and celebration, there was obviously a veil. The happy couple was escorted to their honeymoon suite, veil still in place, and left alone. Then the writer of Genesis brilliantly surprises us with, "When morning came . . . it was Leah!" (Genesis 29:25). Jacob the trickster had been tricked! I'm guessing it was a dark and moonless night in the land of Haran. Maybe that is why the tradition of lifting the veil *during* the wedding ceremony became so popular!

As we heard earlier, after his visit with God on the mountain, Moses' was so filled with wonder and joy that his face beamed with light. It frightened the people who believed first of all that no one could see God face to face and live and, second, that if Moses had done so and some of God's glory had rubbed off on him, then they were in danger just looking at his face. So Moses put on a veil which toned down the light a bit.

Paul addresses this matter and suggests that they got it all wrong from the beginning. God did not tell Moses to cover his face. Moses did that on his own. Was it to protect the people around him? In their understanding it was. Was it also, perhaps, because Moses wanted to keep the glory of God to himself? We wonder!

Reflecting on this story, Presbyterian minister Denise Anderson calls the veiling of Moses' face a shame because, she says, "the people are missing out on an opportunity to witness God's glory."¹ They are missing out on more than seeing God's glory, however. They are missing out on an opportunity to fulfill their calling which God began in their ancestor Abraham. Rev. Anderson continues:

You simply can't see something like that and be unaffected. I think perhaps the people of Israel know that being in the presence of something that remarkable would require them to change. Indeed, they would die—but maybe not in the way they thought. Perhaps in the presence of God, having received God's law, they would find new life. And since the new is often frightening, we don't want any part of that.²

Did you catch that? She went from talking about the ancient Israelites, long gone from the scene, to talking about us! She went from talking about the Israelites fear of death to our fear of new life. Sneaky, isn't she?!

She must have been reading the letters of the Apostle Paul. In that portion of the letter to the believers in Corinth, Paul talks about the consequences of Moses' veil. Not only did he deny the Israelites the delight of sharing the glory of God, he also hardened their hearts against the new life God wanted them to have. Their promise was not merely a prosperous life in a new land. Their promise was to create a new community of people who lived in the glory of the one true God and shared that good news with all the people of the world.

There is another use of a veil mentioned often in the Bible: it was the veil which separated the Holy of holies from the rest of the temple. The Holy of holies is where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. Only the priest could

¹T. Denise Anderson, "Living by the Word: March 3, Transfiguration Sunday," *The Christian Century* (January 30, 2019), 19.

²Anderson.

enter this sacred space at certain times. It was where the people believed God resided. So it was veiled, hidden from the people lest they die from seeing God.

You will remember in the gospels that at the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain in the temple, the veil separating the Holy of holies from the rest of the sanctuary, was torn in two, from top to bottom. That is no little detail in the larger story of the crucifixion. It is a profound statement that in the crucified and soon to be risen Christ, all barriers between us and God are removed. No longer is God veiled from us nor are we veiled from God.

That is why Paul proclaims that there is no separation from God. In Christ Jesus, all the barriers are removed. All veils are lifted. All glory shines for everyone to see. And it is our calling, according to Paul, to let the glory of God shine through us. Perhaps he was thinking about the time that Jesus himself said, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The whole premise is that when we avail ourselves of the opportunity to enjoy the presence of God, we behold God's glory which is life changing. In turn, when we allow the light of God's love to shine through us, others see it and benefit as well.

During the upcoming season of Lent, we are going to lift the veil off God and ourselves. We are going to look and listen for God. We are going to practice stillness in order to catch God coming and going. We are going to go looking for God because God is still among us.

Like all children—even us older ones—our granddaughters love to play hide and seek. When they still lived in Slovakia and our visits were restricted to FaceTime chats, they would shout in the background to Grandma and Grandpa to "Come find me!" While they hid, Robert would take the phone around the apartment as we "looked" for the girls. Now it's a lot more fun in person. Not many minutes after we walk in the door, Savannah and Holly will begin saying, "Grandma, Grandpa . . . come find me!"

Of course, they're not very good at it. They will rush off laughing and squealing to climb under the blanket on a bed, behind a pillow on the sofa, or under the kitchen table. If they are not pretty much in plain view, there is always a foot or arm or the top of a blond head sticking out. Most of the time we walk by them three or four times asking, "Where is Savannah? Where is

Holly? I can't find them." All they while they are giggling and squirming, just waiting to be found and tickled before running off to hide again.

I said they are not very good at hide and seek . . . or are they? The truth is they don't really want to find that perfect hiding place where they will never be found. That's no fun. What they want is to be found so they can run off laughing to hide and be found again.

Maybe God likes playing hide and seek, too. Maybe that is why a veil was allowed in the temple. Not that God wants to get away from us and find a place of quiet and peace where all of the prayers and requests and demands and pleas can't find him. Instead, maybe God wants to be veiled just enough so that its worth our going to hunt for God because we know we will find him. Isn't it true in your case that when you go looking, even if God seems hidden or veiled, you will find God? If you look closely and listen carefully you will see a heavenly hand or a divine toe or hear a holy chuckle and discover God about where you expected God to be all along. And isn't it also true that when we try to hide from God, we don't really want God to give up and go away? We want to be found.

We all want to be found. If you are looking for God and find a veil . . . lift it up! And if you know someone who is looking for God, too, then lift your own veil and show them that God's glory is reflected in your life as well. All in all, God has been playing hide and seek with us since Adam and Eve first tried to hide in the garden. In this game, God wants to be found. How about you?

March 3, 2019

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We do know how Moses felt, O God, even if the memory is a bit dim at times. We know what it is like to be in your presence, to feel the energy of your goodness surround us, and to know without a doubt that we are loved. Sometimes we feel that glow when we are here in this sanctuary. Sometimes it comes with a morning sunrise or an evening sunset. There are times when we are with family or friends and know unmistakably that it is a holy moment. When we grieve, when we rejoice, when we simply take in the moment, if we pause to be still and know, we glow with the gift of your grace. Thank you, O God, for shining your light on and in and through us.

We pray that we will become bold in sharing that light with others. This morning we have named some of our friends who are ill or struggling in some other way. Help us to bring some brightness into their lives through an encouraging word, a thoughtful note, a flower, a call, or a prayer. Use us as your tangible presence, we pray, and do not allow us to hide the glory that you wish us to share with one another.

Help these same friends with whatever needs they have. Help us with all of the needs we carry from place to place. Grant us all the gift of trust so that we do not have to shoulder our burdens alone and rejoice with us when we carry our concerns to you.

Sometimes this glorious world you have given to us begins to feel more dangerous than nurturing and more hateful than loving. At times there is a famine of understanding and generosity and graciousness. Fill our hungry hearts, O God, and teach us how to feed one another the bread of your righteousness. As we gather around this table, nourish us with the food of your Spirit which satisfies us that you are here with us. These things we ask in the holy and life-giving name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.