

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Transfiguration -- February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013

## **2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NIV - 1984)**

**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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 the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

Dear followers of God's saving Gospel. Amen.

Ever thought to yourselves, what would it have been like to be with Peter, James and John and witness the Transfiguration of Jesus. It must have been an awesome sight. Can you imagine it, standing there with Peter, James, and John on that mountain when suddenly Jesus starts glowing and then blazing before your very eyes? John was treated by God to that sight again when he was exiled on the island of Patmos. What an encouragement that must have been for him since things didn't seem like they were going very well for Christianity, not with the current emperor Domitian in power anyway. Christians were dying for their faith and John had been arrested and taken away from his beloved congregation in Ephesus. Yet Jesus appeared to John in a way that said: "Remember how I looked on that mountain six months before I was crucified? How I shone brighter than the sun? I was in control then as the glorious Son of God and I'm in control now."

If only we could see Jesus like that in his glory. If we saw Jesus in his glory, wouldn't that make our faith stronger? If we saw Jess in his glory, wouldn't that make us want to follow him even more? But if we really think about it, we have seen Jesus' glory! That's the point of today's sermon text. The Apostle Paul wants us to know that . . .

### **Sermon Theme: We Have Seen His Glory!**

- 1. By God's Grace**
- 2. Through the Gospel**

Paul was writing to a congregation that wasn't quite sure about his ministry. Was he really sent to them by God? If so, why weren't there more conversions when Paul preached? I know I've asked that same question about the ministry God has given to me. If we're really from God, then why is it such a struggle to get more people in through these doors on a Sunday morning? In fact, many people have commented to me and Pastor Schultz how much church attendance seems to be down the last year or so - -why is that happening? Maybe we are doing something wrong or maybe we need to change things up. But Paul wants us to focus on the main point here. Paul wants us to recognize some very important points, but Paul's answer is at the same time comforting and troubling. He said: "**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.**"<sup>4</sup> **The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot**

**see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4).**

The reason a blind man can't see the sun is not because the sun is not shining; it's because the man is blind. In the same way when people don't believe the gospel message about Jesus or stop coming to church, it isn't because that message is somehow defective, it's because Satan, or the **“god of this age”** as Paul calls him, has blinded their hearts. And while it is always easier to point our fingers at those whose church attendance is down or those whose church offerings are infrequent or non-existent, the real truth is that at one time we too were blind to God's glory. We see that glory now only because God shined faith into our hearts. Paul put it this way: **“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 the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).**

Paul takes us all the way back to the creation of the world with this passage. He tells us that if God had never said: “And let there be light,” light never would have come into existence. Not even in a million years. In the same way had God not created faith in our hearts we too would still be in spiritual darkness. We would not understand just how offensive our sins are to God and that we need a savior. There would be no hope of salvation for us – not even in a million years.

So why did God choose to shine faith in our hearts? He did so because of his love, because of his grace – not because he saw anything in us that would deserve his love. It's humbling to think, isn't it, that we're even lowlier than a humble supermarket vegetable? What do I mean? Well when you go to pick up some fresh produce you make some attempt to pick the best lettuce or the best apple out of the bin, don't you? The thing is when God looked at the bin of humanity he saw people who were rotten and good for nothing and really deserved to be thrown out of his loving presence. Still he loved us and instead of throwing us out he shined his love on us and poured his love into us.

## **2. Through the Gospel**

How do we know all this? Through the gospel message, explains Paul, for there we see God's glory. No, fireworks don't shoot off the page when you read the good news about what Jesus did to save us from our sins but the account of Jesus' life, his death, and resurrection are glorious. They're glorious because through them Jesus provided salvation for all, and they're glorious because they show off God's essence. Jesus' death, for example, shows how God is just and cannot tolerate sin. If God could tolerate sin, he would not have sent his Son to become man and die such a horrible death. At the same time Jesus' crucifixion shows how God is loving. Instead of punishing us, God punished his Son in our place. Through the gospel message you know what makes God, God. Let the philosophers speculate about God's qualities, you know the truth. You have seen God's glory through the gospel.

But let me warn you, we can become blind again. That's what Satan wants and continues to work at. And frankly it doesn't really take much to blind us. Just think of how you can block the sun's light with something as small as a penny. If you hold a penny just right the sun's rays won't reach your eye. And so when people fall from faith that fall always starts with something small. Perhaps it's a small worry about how you'll pay the mortgage and before long you become obsessed with earning money. You think to yourself that if you can just make it through the next few years then you can take it easy and get back to being more serious about your spiritual

health. But the thing is whenever we cut back on reading and hearing God's Word we are cutting the amount of God's light that reaches us. The more light Satan can block the more he can get us to buy into his lies.

We shouldn't need extra encouragement to live in the light of the gospel. We have seen the light of the Gospel Son all around us. So why not maximize your exposure to the Son's light? Here's what that light does for us. The light of the cross whites out our sins so that we don't have to carry around a load of guilt. The light from Christ's empty tomb pierces our dark and dreary days when nothing seems to go right assuring us that better days are ahead. The light of Christ's ascension illuminates his promise that God really is in control and is bending your sicknesses and financial challenges into something eternally good for you. Satan may try to use our sins and failures to prompt us to live in the shadows of doubt but God continues to shine on us through his Son so that we constantly stand in the spotlight of his love. Open your eyes to that light and bask in its warmth and comfort!

The glorified and shining Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration must have been some sight. Peter recalled it years later in a letter to some Christians (2 Peter 1:16 ff.). And John must have been reminded of that event when he was given another mountaintop experience on the island of Patmos where he had been exiled. Except that at this mountaintop experience it wasn't Christ who was transfigured, but the Church, adorned in the glory of the exalted Christ as it was displayed as the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of the heavens (Revelation 21). John saw the Church not as it looks now – a huddled mass of sinners just trying to hang on until heaven. Rather he described us as shining with gold and adorned with all kinds of precious gems. This is the transfiguration that awaits all those who continue to stand in the light of God's grace as revealed to us through the gospel. Keep standing in that light and one day you will beam, yes literally beam with God's glory forever. Amen.