

THE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
THE GOSPEL: Luke 9:28-43

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany
March 3, 2019

“Our Transfiguration”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace, peace and truth and the beauty of the Gospel be with you now and forever. Amen

I have preached on Transfiguration Sunday this gentle message that kind of goes like this... You can have mountaintop experiences in your life, but you have to come down and face reality. You can be up, but you have to come back down. I didn't like that message, it's too simplistic for the beauty of this congregation, so I prayed for inspiration. It came in this regard which is to use the transfiguration, reflecting the love of God as a source of our own transfiguration, our own changing.

Said slightly differently, I remember Lent as a time of taking away, taking away things that you may enjoy to understand the sacrifice that Christ had met. I never did very well with that. So I was trying to figure out a way to encourage you, and it kind of goes this way. It isn't a matter of the will, it isn't the matter of the heart, it is a matter of simply reflecting the truth of Christ's love and allowing that reflection out into the world to change us. It's reflective. Reflection or this word goes back to the word reflex. If you remember the old tests, you remember getting hit with that little hammer in your knees or elbows which are supposed to move in a particular direction? It's the idea that reflection is a chance for the Spirit to do its work, a natural response back to the love of God. If you have a clear mirror of Christ's love, then you are able to respond with according clarity.

That's what I hope that the Epiphany season has been for you, those who have been attending each week, to understand the clarity of God's love. A time of boldness, a time of understanding. This amazing message. So as the light came to the wise men and allowed them to see Christ, it is this clarity of God's love that allows us a chance for reflection.

Second Corinthians text speaks of this unveiled faces, this is an illusion to Moses. When Moses was interacting with God so directly, his face would become animated and shining, basically the experience, the glory of God. It was disruptive to people so they basically asked him – we are very upset and we are scared when you look that way, so put this veil on. That's what the metaphor is, that we have an unveiled look. The Lord is the one who removes any barriers and we have that beautiful unveiled face which has seen the glory of God. That phrase, “the glory of God” in this time and this place.

I ask you to reflect upon the different experiences you have had, perhaps the mountaintop experiences. I'll just go to camp, Camp Luther Crest and Carol Joy Holling Camp in Nebraska and all the multitude of camps are often mountaintop experiences for young people. I certainly know that a mountaintop experiences for the councilors that are leading our young people, and many people. At least in Nebraska, I know this, over 44 people who were councilors have become pastors from that experience. Think about the different mountaintop experiences that you have had. Think about the ones that we have here gathered in our own church.

We have some friends down from Nebraska. It's a good move, I think it was -5 maybe -9 degrees this morning. So it's a good time to come down here and enjoy Sun City and Sun City West area. I was speaking to them of something they will enjoy, which is for our communion experience, that we sing the Lord's Prayer together. For most people, the Lord's Prayer is a solo act, you have heard that right? Maybe at a wedding or a funeral, but I am still struck by the glory of God as we sing together. Isn't it an amazing experience? One of the most beautiful experiences I have had in worship. I ask that this sanctuary, that word meaning safety, a place for you and I to experience the glory of God and to continue to reflect this love, is always for you, that's why you are always welcome here, and to welcome others into this ministry.

The idea of this reflection is based upon a true mirror. Growing up in West Point, Nebraska, I remember when the carnival would come. I remember my mom warning me that the carnies were in town, that was the only time that we would lock our doors at our house. No offense to the carnies, we just didn't know them well, and they had tattoos back then. So my mom wanted us to look out. I still remember that, it's the only time we would lock the doors. You remember those mirrors, the convex and the concave mirrors that can either make you skinny or fat, and how that distorts. That to me is what epiphany is about, making statements that keep us away from distorting. If we reflected distortion, we can cause a lot of problems.

I just wanted to recap very briefly what we have been studying in epiphany. First was the affirmation of baptism. You hear it again here, this beautiful phrase, "*not just my beloved, my chosen*". That is our position in front of the Lord. We, as adopted members of God's family, chosen, particular, individually, and as a group, this understanding that our identity comes as children of God.

Second was activating spiritual gifts. You have seen that movement here in the church, but what a diversity of talent and experiences we have here. That God wants you to use your experience and for the sake of helping others. Clarity in God's word, to spend time in the word, the law and the Gospel to help us understand God's intent, God's instruction. Always with God's grace as the predominant message.

Perhaps you remember when I spoke of God's call upon your life, that God calls you to different ministry and different life. I want to give a special shout out to my friend William. William is our visual tech. He came to me and said, "That was a great sermon, I heard God's call. I am leaving." Would you give him a round of applause and thank him for his ministry here? I wanted to tease, I didn't mean that for staff, but he has heard God's call in his life to take his audio and visual skills and take that in production of Christian movies. I just ask for God's speed as the future opens for you William. That is the truth, God has a call for each one of us.

The last one was, you can trust God. You can clearly trust God. God has your interests in mind. These are the things to reflect upon during this Lenten season. These are not distorted messages these are the true mirror of the love of Christ.

As we move forward then, this challenge to take time to reflect. Peter is always saying wonderful things. "We need to stay up here, and see this incredible glory of God." And this statement of Moses and Elisha gives hope to me of God's plan. It's such a dear message here, they were speaking, they appeared in glory. Here's Moses of the law and Elisha the prophet with Jesus and they are speaking of this word, his departure. And in Greek that means Jesus' own exodus. That's the word, his exodus, his departure for the pursuit and glory of God, and of course his return for our salvation.

I want to encourage you, my last encouragement for today. This idea of understanding the clarity of God's love and taking time to reflect. If we get off track and reflect messages that reflect our own doubts, then we are at risk. Let's see if we can take this, all these things, that we can trust the Lord. There is clarity in God's call. There is clarity of love in God's word. That we can have our gifts used for the sake of the Gospel and for the pursuit of other people and to affirm our identity as children of God.

This statement, Jesus answers when he hears that his own disciples could not heal. "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you?" The answer to that is forever and ever and ever, amen. Don't ever give up on God's love for you, that's the first reflection to know God's love is absolutely for you. That God's love is forever and ever and ever. How long must I be with you and bear with you? For all of life. Because it ends, bring your son here, this is our God of healing.

I ask you to create holy spaces to reflect. Perhaps in your own home you have a favorite place to go, a favorite chair, a favorite part of the home, maybe outside as the beautiful days unfold. I am so thankful, in our home Debbie has a little corner area where early in the morning she gets up and reads her scriptures and devotionals and takes time to reflect. It's a beautiful thing to see. I was kind of teasing her that my time for reflection appears to be when I soak in the hot tub. The answer to that would be – that's not reflection, that's called relaxation.

Relaxation is important, but reflecting upon God's truth is where it is at. So I ask you, at your own home during this Lenten season, and I would hope for every day, that you have that. Certainly here in the church, to reflect as we soon celebrate our experience of God being with us through the wonderful communion. I ask you to continue to reflect in the music and in the words and in the joy of gathering together. Reflecting in the life.

Then last, just life itself. I had just complimented my friend Chuck, he is my partner in ministry, my older brother in faith, and to see the heart felt emotion being expressed in his love for his son and love for the Lord, and love for his wife has just been truly inspiring to me. It's in the difficulty of life that we experience the reflection that can allow us to see the truth of God's love.

My father, as you may remember, has fallen several times. I went back last week to be with him. He fell again after his surgery. So he has had to have two surgeries. Anybody here from South Dakota? You people are tough, that's all I have to say. My dad is not very happy right now, but he is definitely surviving. In fact, I wish I had the gift to write him a country western song. My dad has survived a rattlesnake bite, he survived a stampede of 250 head of cattle, he has survived a roll over in a tractor, he has survived a tornado. Can you kind of hear it? I can almost hear it coming up, that's my daddy.

I am so thankful because as one grows older, and some of us are experiencing, there is just a great author, he is so awesome – Frederick Buechner. He is in his 90's now also. My dad is soon to be 96. Frederick is definitely in his 90's, and he wrote this. *“One of the blunders religious people are particularly fond of making is the attempt to be more spiritual than God.”* Sometimes I think that's a good way for us to enter Lent, is not to keep the concept so high and mighty, but just to keep it very real. That even in our homes as we reflect upon the love of God, even here in church as we reflect upon the love of God. In the midst of life, in the midst of the word becoming flesh, in the midst of the incarnation, in the midst of life with each other. There is a chance for reflection of God's tremendous love for you. The clarity of God's love revealed as in a mirror. Our own transformation, not by our effort but by simply reflecting truths of God's love in Jesus Christ.

I pray that this is your best Lent ever, based upon the reflection of these truths, and the joy of gathering together. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen