

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**The Rev. Robert M. Alexander**  
**“Unveiled”**  
**Exodus 34:29-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:12-18**  
**Transfiguration of the Lord**  
**February 7, 2016**

Many of us have had mountain top experiences at some point in our lives. Some of those have been quite literal – hiking up Lookout Mountain at Montreat or up Mt. Baldy at Philmont with the Scouts or up Springer Mountain at the trailhead of the Appalachian Trail scratching one more thing off your bucket list. Then there are the figurative mountain top experiences – those events or periods of time which have brought an unusual level of excitement and enthusiasm and growth to an individual or a group – a special family vacation perhaps, or a youth retreat, a mission trip, or a magical season for your sports team. It has been an experience like that for many people who are Carolina Panther fans this year. Despite the one loss in the season, the team keeps on pounding - and climbing - up that mountain until it peaks later today in Santa Clara, CA.

Reaching the mountaintop is often accompanied by celebration. We shout! We cheer! We might even cry! Sometimes we dance to show our joy. The Panthers have shown us how to do that this year – like in the following clip.

But, unfortunately, mountain top experiences can fade. The view from the top can fade from our memory. The connections that we feel with others who have been with us on such experiences can diminish. The things we learn and “the high” that we can experience can slowly drift away as we settle back into the reality of day to day life back in the valley. But most of our lives must be lived there, where our feet of clay continue to walk on the earth rather than in the clouds. In the clouds, our dreams carry us to places where it isn’t hard to imagine being the kind of people and community that God calls us to be. When we get back to life and back to reality with our feet on the ground in the dirt and mud of the day to day grind – then it can become more challenging to remember who we are and what we are called to be.

It reminds me of the little boy who ran into his house after playing in the yard one day. “Who am I?” he asked his mother. Ready to play along with him, she said, “I don’t know! Who are you?” “Wow!” cried the boy, “Mrs. Johnson was right! She said that I was so dirty that my own mother wouldn’t even recognize me!”

On this Transfiguration Sunday we remember Jesus transfigured on the mountain before Peter, James, and John. He was clearly identified by the brilliance of his glory and by the voice from the clouds that named him as Messiah and Son of the Living God. When the brilliance of the light faded, his followers continued to recognize who he was through his acts of love and sacrifice that caused him to set his face toward Jerusalem and to offer himself freely for the sake of the world. Through the blood, sweat, and tears of his sacrificial journey we see him still and we know his glory.

Our Old Testament lesson this morning reminds us of another mountain top experience. Moses’ conversations with God on the mountain left him with a bad sunburn – even worse than what some of our youth had coming back from their recent ski trip. It seems that Moses caught some of the glory of God in those conversations and the bright glow of his face made the people a bit uncomfortable. So after Moses told the people everything that God had said, he would cover his face up with a veil so the people wouldn’t continue to gaze upon his face in fear. Moses continued this practice whenever he would go into the Tent of Meeting to speak with God. He would uncover his face when he went in and when he exited he would tell the

people what God had said, face fully ablaze! Then he would cover up his face with the veil until the next time that he went into the tent.

As you may know, Moses represents the covenant of the law, what Christians sometimes call the Old Covenant. It is a covenant based on do's and don'ts – rights and wrongs – ifs and thens. If you follow my commandments, then I will be your God!

Fast forward to the first century and Jesus introduces the idea of a New Covenant – a Covenant, as we will hear at the table, which is based on Christ's blood. His sacrifice – the gift of his life and love - are all that is required for us to experience God's grace. Jesus clearly teaches that this doesn't nullify the law or diminish its importance. The New Covenant is needed, not because the Old was inadequate, but because of our sin and the hardness of the human heart. Everything taught in the law, which is summarized in the rule of love, is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And so we see the glory of God that the Old Covenant was meant to display in the fulfillment of that law, that is, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthian church interpreted the story of Moses to them by suggesting that the veil was necessary for Moses because the people were living under the old covenant which was temporary. He reminded them that in Christ there is a new and everlasting covenant which has removed the veil – fully displaying the glory of God for all to see. You see - the veil was used because of the fear of the fading of the glory of God, but in Christ, the glory of God is fully present with us for all time. He has come and has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us. And so we are invited to live in faith, with hope and boldness, proclaiming the good news of the gospel by any means possible, and allowing God's Spirit to change us little by little to more perfectly reflect the glory of God to the world and to each other.

It's like coming down from the mountain and reliving that mountain top experience day after day after day so that the effects of it never wear off.

Many of you know about our partnership with the communities of Kilambe, Nicaragua. Some of our members have been on multiple mission trips there and have gathered a whole host of stories about their adventures. There's another mountain-top experience for you! I want to tell you about one of the people that our group has gotten to know over the years. Her name is Juana Videa. She is an amazing woman with wonderful gifts for leadership. She lives in a community at the bottom of Mt. Kilambe in a small home of cinderblock walls a tin roof and dirt floors. Juana has this amazing ability to reflect God's goodness and glory to those she meets. She loves fiercely and cares about her community, especially the children and youth. She is their advocate. She works with them, sacrifices for them, invites them into her home, and helps connect their families with the resources that will help them succeed. Every time we are there, as we gather for prayer and reflection, you can tell that her spiritual life is rich and full. She takes what she learns and shares it with others. Despite the struggles that she faces in her day to day to life, she is able to see clearly who Christ is and who she is called to be in Christ. She reflects that goodness and grace and inspires her community members and community partners like us.

Within the Christian tradition we speak of the Doctrine of Sanctification. It is the belief that God is changing us by degrees, shaping our lives to more perfectly reflect God's glory. Another way to say this is to speak about being made holy. This coming Wednesday we begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday. Our theme for the season is "Be Holy" and we will have ample opportunity to consider what that might mean and what it might not mean. We will be encouraged to pray and read and study and meditate and reflect. I don't want to talk about it too much today because we haven't gotten there yet, but I do want us to think about that word "reflect." That word, as you know has a couple of different meanings. We can reflect on a subject, as in thinking deeply about it, and we can also reflect light or heat, or some image as with the reflection of a mirror.

Today I want to challenge us to consider the later. Our scripture challenges us to reflect the image of Christ more and more in the world. And when we turn to the Lord, Paul wrote, the veil is removed and the Holy Spirit enables us to do just that. We are free to be transformed – the word used means that we actually experience a metamorphosis – and the glory of God shines in us.

When we come down from the mountaintop, the thrill of the experience and the memory of the view may diminish but we know that the presence of God in Jesus Christ is still with us and we do not need to fear. We only need to face the Lord once again, and hear his voice of love, hear his invitation to come to the table, hear his promise to feed us, fill us, and send us out to reflect his goodness and glory for all the world to see.

When we come down off the mountain we find a mountain of need right in our backyards. Just like Moses found his people in need right there among the tents of the Israelites and Jesus and the disciples found need right away when they came off the mount of transfiguration, just like Juana finds need every day among her neighbors in Maleconcito. We will find that there is never any shortage of need until the end of time when there will be no more tears and no more death and illness, and I suppose no more hungry bellies to feed. But for now, there is no shortage of opportunity to make a difference. And today we follow the lead of our SCOUTS who have been out SCOUTING for FOOD and our Youth who are collecting for SOUPER BOWL OF CARING and our MISSION COMMITTEE MEMBERS who are serving meals at Mooresville Soup Kitchen and Angels and Sparrows Soup Kitchen and our CHILDREN who are making sandwiches for Urban Ministry and volunteers who are helping out at Loaves and Fishes and folks who are serving our guests at Room in the Inn – we follow their lead to get out there and make a difference with unveiled faces – reflecting the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as we feed the hungry, cloth the naked, visit the imprisoned, care for the sick, shelter the homeless and love all of God’s children with the love that transforms and changes us one little step and degree at a time.

There is a lovely little verse at the end of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Now, one of the reasons I like it so much is because I saw it posted in bold letters on the wall of nursery in a church somewhere. The verse reads, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed!” This just shows you how important context can be. It isn’t really about babies and sleep and wet diapers but rather it is Paul’s attempt to bring words of comfort and assurance to the church about the last days and about the resurrection to eternal life. And the promise is that in the end the people of God will be completely changed –transformed into the fullness of God’s glory in Christ. And that day will come friends when that work of God is finished. But until then, we have this promise that it comes by degrees – step by step as we journey together with unveiled faces – Worshipping, Learning, Serving, Loving, and Giving, Seeking to Realize God’s Vision for the World.

So friends – even as we come down off the mountain – and perhaps especially then – may we face the Lord – so that we may celebrate God’s goodness. May we, with unveiled faces, reflect the glory of the Lord through our words and through our actions in the name of Jesus Christ.

**To God be the Glory! Amen.**