Reflections of Glory Peace Presbyterian Church

2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6 Transfiguration Sunday

Elizabeth M. Deibert 11 February 2024

Broken sentences. Cognitive decline. Broken bodies. Difficulty walking. Broken relationships. Painful reflections. Broken trust. Vulnerable and Defensive. Broken systems. Despair and frustration. Into our humanity’s brokenness, God in Christ came to dwell and not just to be with us, but to transform us. He did not remove our suffering, but made it possible that even suffering might bring out the light of Christ in us, thanks to the Spirit steady at work in us.

The Apostle Paul seemed to know this. He was being pushed to the limit by his own physical frailty. With the strength and image-loving Corinthians, he was defensive about the way God can use weakness to display power. He was so taken with the glory of God, he was convinced that the Christ could shine through us, no matter our broken circumstances. So we do not lose heart, though we are losing people. We do not lose heart, though we are losing the abilities we had. We do not lose heart, though people sometimes grossly disappoint us. We do not lose heart, though the institutions upon which we have depended are crumbling around us. We do not lose heart even when it seems hatred is getting the last word. Why? Because we are servants and siblings of Jesus Christ, who went up the mountain for a brief, shining moment. We belong to God and God’s glory is going to shine, even in the darkness.

Prayer: *Eternal God, you revealed to the disciples the everlasting glory of Jesus Christ. Grant us, who have not seen and yet believe, the gift of your Holy Spirit’s freedom, that we may boldly live the gospel and shine with your transforming glory, as people changed and changing through the redeeming presence of our Savior. Amen.*

***2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6 (NRSVue)***

**17**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18**And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

4 Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. **2**We have renounced the shameful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. **3**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4**In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing clearly the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5**For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’s sake. **6**For it is the God who said, *“Light will shine out of darkness,”* who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. Freedom – that wonderful word that this country loves, but does not understand. You see, in this country, we define freedom as freedom from other people, but in the Spirit our freedom is for other people. We are free to be as loving toward other people as was Jesus. It can get scary to love people. It is messy to love people. It takes time to love people. You have to watch your boundaries when you love people, so you do not lose yourself. But loving other people is what makes this life beautiful, meaningful, glorious.

When we love, as a reflection of the love that God poured into us, then that glory in us begins to shine. We may not shine as brightly as Jesus did on the mountain of Transfiguration, but we do have our own shining moments of love. I have seen that love this week. In a husband caring for his wife, doing everything possible to make sure she is getting the best treatment possible. In a mom making personal adjustments so her children could have dad time. In a family surrounding a loved one with tender support as her remaining days in this life are short. In a wife grieving but grateful for her life and family, courageous enough to tackle new things. In the church taking itself out to where people are in need and communing there. In the patient-generous-kindness of congregants grateful for the church’s ministry, even when it falters sometimes. In a ministry team, practicing self-control when tensions are high, to value everyone in the room.

In the larger connectional church, people being supportive and interested in one another at installations, conferences, and financial investment meetings. Where the Spirit of the Lord is…there is peace and joy and freedom and love.

Paul is concerned about one thing – not his image, not his personal well-being, but proclaiming Jesus Christ. He is free, in that the glory of God shining is all that truly matters.

Sometimes it seems the image of God is what is left when all our layers of the life we are determined to control are stripped away. We are created, first and foremost, to be loving companions of one another on this earth. We lose our way in futile striving for protection, prestige and power. Vulnerability is scary but what we do in those moments has the greatest potential for demonstrating God’s glory.

If someone looks at you, are they seeing lots of layers of you, or are you actively peeling back to let God’s glory shine? The purpose of the season we are about to enter, starting this Wednesday, is the development of a deeper connection to Christ. With a deeper connection, we are freer to be like a mirror. We do not need to worry that someone will see right through to all our faults.

Jesus on the mountain of Transfiguration with his closest friends did not want them fretting about what they should do next. They had just seen Jesus, Moses, Elijah, all together, and the brightness of Christ’s face. But the message from the clouds was simply a reminder from God – this is my Son. Listen to him. Listening for Christ in daily life is THE most important thing we can do.

People often speak to me about eternal life as if they are getting there by a report card, like getting good grades for life. For other people, it seems like the only thing on the report card that matters is that you have uttered a certain set of words, proving that you have a moment when you put your trust in Jesus Christ. I believe we should always be growing in our trust of Jesus Christ, always seeking to reflect his grace in our every word and action. Surely we are saved by grace, a gift, and it is Christ light shining in us that helps us right now to live into eternal life, here and now, more and more each day.

So that when we depart this life, we are already very comfortable with living in God’s house, according to the Spirit who makes us free. Eternal life is about living as free as we are in Christ – not free to do what we want, but free to love as we were created to love. To reflect God’s glory given us – to be who we really are.

In Montreat week before last, Richard and I hiked a short distance up the Mica trail in the campground, called that because the trail is full of the sheet silicate mineral that is formed in layers that reflect a lot of light. Mica is like a mirror in the mud. I remember as a child in Montreat being so fascinated by its glistening glory. (slide click twice) Some mica is like this, clearly distinguishable, layered, reflective and flexible, the way mica is supposed to be. Other mica has been fused with rock or covered in mud, and its reflective power and flexibility is greatly diminished. Just like us, sometime the stressors of the world stick to us, making it harder for us to be flexible, humble, patient, and kind, reflecting back the love we’ve been given. Seeing God’s glory is all about wonder and curiosity and openness to the work God is doing in people, even the ones with hard edges and muddy surfaces. Listen carefully for the words of Jesus, calling you into the goodness and love that you cannot muster yourself; the more you hear his voice, the more yours will resemble his, just as youth pick up the language, accent, and behavior of the people they are around. This is why being together as a church matters – we can build our common language and community and can shine the smudges off one another, so we can better reflect God’s glory.

**18**And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed (passive verb) into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. **6**For it is the God (not us) who said, *“Light will shine out of darkness,”* (it is the Spirit) who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.