

Changed Into His Likeness.

Text: 2 Cor 3:12-18

Suggested Hymns:
37, 272a, 747a, 358, 164

- 1) Changed into His likeness
- 2) Beware, For You May See, But Still Be The Same As Before
- 3) You Can See And Be Bold!
- 4) You Can Look And Be Changed Like Him!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, ¹² *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech -- ¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

¹⁷ *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is the Festival of the Transfiguration, the last Sunday after the Epiphany. Today we think of ourselves as being with Christ on the mountain when He was transfigured. His face shone like the sun and His garments became *“white as the light.”* You heard the full account in the Gospel reading a few minutes ago.

But if you are to be with Him, you will have to go and join Him. You cannot really, of course, because it all happened many years ago. But it did happen. And it was one of the things that Jesus did in saving you.

We celebrate the days of the Church Year to help you find how the things Jesus did while living with men on earth affect you. So you must think of these as happening to you, and changing you.

Today you are being reminded that you are being “changed into His likeness.”

One of the things the sight of Jesus’ splendour should do to you is to make you adore Him, and love Him. What a wonderful Friend! The words of the Introit are to remind you of that wonderful Transfiguration, that wonderful Son of God whose Father was pleased with Him.

He will be pleased with you, too, if you will remember Him in love, if you will adore Him, and if you will let Him change you into His likeness. May the Lord bless our meditation on this Transfiguration Sunday.

1. Changed Into His Likeness

“How good, Lord, to be here!” we sing in the hymn of the Transfiguration. One purpose of observing the Church Year is to picture ourselves in the events that it remembers. Our Lord was transfigured on the mountain. We think of it as happening again today in order to be reminded of how it affects our lives.

But where do we get the boldness that assumes we would be among the three chosen to go with Jesus up the mountain, and would not be among the nine who were left behind? Where, for that matter, is the boldness that we would be, and that we are, among His special friends at all. Consider for a moment that there were so many more people who never met Christ, than those who knew Him while He was on earth!

There were many more boys who never played with the twelve-year-old Jesus than boys who did. There were many people who were not invited to the wedding to see Jesus’ first miracle. There are many whose boats were lost in sudden squalls on the Sea of Galilee. There are many people who knew suffering and sorrow, sickness or death but did not have the miracle-working Lord come into their homes to bring peace and life again.

“How good, Lord, to be here!” we sing it. Is it boldness? Or is it just being smart? No! It is confidence! A confidence that our text helps to establish,

because it assures us that we are not only able to see His unfading splendour as His disciples, but we, too, are transfigured!

The message is the same — *“We are being transformed into the same image,” “He was transfigured before them.”* This is the foundation of our confidence. The Holy Spirit of God has given us vision, made us free and made us friends; and as we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are being changed into His likeness.

Our confidence would be simply be ‘being smart’ if we failed to heed the warning St. Paul writes in this text.

2. Beware, For You May See But Still Be The Same As Before

The comparison to an event in Moses’ life brings the warning before us. Our text says, ¹² *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech --* ¹³ *unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.*

There is a danger that ours is but a fading splendour. Moses had gone back up into the mountain after he had broken the first tablets of the Law in fury at Israel’s idolatry with the golden calf. God instructed him to carve a second set of stone tablets and then gave him the words of the Law once again.

The splendour of the holy God with whom he worked, made his face radiant. When he came down, *“the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.”* But, although Aaron and the people of Israel were afraid, Moses talked to them. ³⁴ *But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded.* ³⁵ *And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.* ¹

The point is not that Moses had to veil his face because the people could not bear to look upon the reflected glory of God. He veiled his face so that the people would not see the glory fade.

Moses let them see the glory on his face, but then veiled his face so that they would not see the glory fading, until he spoke to God again and received a new reflection of God's splendour.

In the comparison lies our warning. The vision of God which made Moses' face shine did not change him. He was the same as before, this was but a fading splendour. The people of Israel saw the reflection of God in Moses' face and were afraid for a while, but their conduct toward Moses in later days showed that they had not really changed. In them, too, it was a fading splendour.

Isn't that every earnest Christian's greatest grief? The splendour of the Lord is risen upon us, lightnings, lighten the world, and Jesus who is fairer than the children of men appears to us, and we fall upon our faces. We resolve to do things for Him. We know it is life's highest good to be with Him.

Then the next moment comes along, the next day, the next temptation, and the splendour fades. Why can't our Christian life really be lived on the heights? Why do we always stumble down into the valley again? Our face shines today with the splendour of His epiphany, but we almost want to veil it, for we know from experience that as we watch we will see "*the end of the fading splendour.*" What is the trouble? How are we really to be changed into His likeness?

Then there is a danger that we do not even see the real splendour. Our trouble may be the same as the Israelites' of whom St. Paul is writing. He changes the picture slightly to give a second warning that men may see but still be the same as before.

Now he pictures a veil covering people's minds so that they do not comprehend God's splendour. Our text says, ¹⁴ *But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.* ¹⁵ *But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.*

People can see the splendour of God's revelation but not understand what it is all about. Moses wanted the people to see God's glory in his face so that they would understand the Law came from the Holy One, the sinless One. God wanted them to know it, that was why He gave His commandments.

Paul had called it a *ministry of condemnation*². They were to see His just demands and realise that they could never match God's standard of holiness. God wanted them to see His splendour and cry to His mercy for forgiveness.

But the Israelites took the veil Moses had put aside so that it would not hide the glory and dropped it over their minds. They turned the point of the glory around. They took all the glory and said, "*We must be a pretty splendid people that God chooses us to be His own. We aren't perfect, but God must be satisfied with us as we are.*" They did not even see the real splendour, that God's mercy and forgiveness were shining for all who would repent and trust His grace. And so the splendour faded.

Why do our splendid moments of determination fade? Why do so many of our good resolutions fail to become kept resolutions? Why do we seem not to be changing into His likeness?

If we think to become better by our own resolution, if we feel our "*earnest purpose to amend our sinful lives*" can be accomplished by our intention and not only "*by the assistance of God the Holy Spirit,*" we are sure to see the splendour fade. And no veil of explanation, such as, "*Everybody's human*"; "*You can't expect perfection this side of heaven*"; "*You're only young once*"; "*I don't claim to be a saint*"— will hide our bitter tears when these eyes which see the glory of the Lord see also that our deeds have made the splendour fade, and we are still unchanged. We have seen His glory, and yet we behave as we behaved before.

3. You Can See And Be Bold!

St. Paul brings us then the challenge and comfort: *You can see and be bold!*

He says it of himself and his companions, *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech.* His hope lies in the "*dispensation of righteousness,*" which, he says, "*far exceeds in splendour*" the old condemning dispensation.

When God showed His love for man in the gift of His Son, there was a splendour! When Jesus revealed His deity, His power to save to the uttermost, there was a glory! And this glory means a glorious change in us.

St. Paul tells us how it works in our text, ... *when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* That is part of the comparison to Moses. He took off the veil

when he went into the presence of God, and God's splendour shone upon him again. He adds, ¹⁷ *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

This is what it means. When we are really turned by the Holy Spirit to the Lord, trusting in Him to give us His righteousness, we are freed. He forgives our iniquity. He remembers that we are dust. He Himself takes on our frail nature and by His love suffers the temptations that come to us, but He conquers them.

He endures the punishment of our sins but rises triumphant from the death they bring. This is righteousness that is ours in the New Testament, not a righteousness that we attempt by our deeds, only to see the splendour fade, but a perfect righteousness such as only God can have. It is a righteousness that He gives freely, fully, to all who will believe and repent and turn to Him in trust and love.

If you have a person in your house who likes to take photos and is continually lurking around the corners with his camera taking pictures using the flash, you know how the flash light of God catches those who do not understand.

You look up with a startled expression and open mouth, you see the flash, and for several moments the glare continues in your eyes wherever you look, and then it fades away. But you know what the picture will be like, terrible. That is the way the light of God's Law catches us, startled in our sin, not looking as we want to look in the sight of God, but faces distorted with evil thoughts and desires, mouths twisted in half-hearted resolutions.

But now we can see and be bold. For the Spirit of the Lord has come to us and given us freedom from the fear of what will develop. The Holy Spirit has given us confidence, for He has led us to know and love Jesus who will do the developing. There is greater joy still. He not only covers up our sins, our lack of character, the past that shows in our faces, but He changes us!

4. You Can Look And Be Changed Like Him!

Our text says, ¹⁸ *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

A skilful technician can retouch a picture, but God does more. He changes us. His Spirit transforms us so that we look not as we really are but as His love makes us. We know He does this to us. "*Seeing the glory of the Lord,*" we know we are "*being changed or transformed into His likeness.*" The final result is not what we look like, but what He looks like, for His forgiving love changes us back to His image.

Here is our source of boldness, we know as we see with unveiled face the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ that He is changing us into His likeness. Where there is this Lord, this Spirit and this turning to the Lord, there is freedom. And there is boldness to reflect the glory of the Lord. Since we know how God is changing us, we can boldly speak out for Christ, we can be confident that we really are among His best friends.

When you are not sure if your hat is on straight, or if you will pass inspection by an employer, you are self-conscious. But God has now given Himself for us, Himself to us. He has straightened us out. He has clothed us in His holiness. Now we are God-conscious, and seeing His glory, reflecting His glory, we are bold.

There is more than boldness, there is great joy! A person who begins to recover after a long illness feels the same kind of joy, of renewed zest in living. Every day he grows stronger. He is changing back to his former healthy state.

Behold, look, see, and you shall be changed. The three disciples were instructed not to tell what they had seen on the mountain, but do you suppose they could help showing it? They were changed, they could no longer look at Jesus in the old way, in quite the same way the other disciples saw Him.

The same thing is happening to you. See Him, your Brother, your God, your Saviour, your Friend! Seeing Him, do you not see your own plans begin to change, your love warm, your anger fade? You are being changed into His likeness!

But do not be complacent over a partial transfiguration. Don't stop where you are. Look at the Lord today, change more each day. Where will you see the glory of the Lord? St. Peter made that clear in the Epistle. The men who wrote the Scriptures were not passing on fables, they were the eyewitnesses of His majesty. They have set His glory into letters for us to read and see; and Jesus

Christ has placed Himself with His transforming blessings into bread and wine, that we might receive Him and be changed to His likeness.

Do not be impatient if your transfiguration is slow. We are being changed from one degree of glory to another. And it is *“the Lord who is the Spirit”* who is changing us. We read in John 3:8, ⁸ *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

He will perform the good work He has begun in you. Perform your good work, see His glory, and be bold! Look at His glory, and be changed into His likeness! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Exodus 34:34-35

² 2 Corinthians 3:9