

Preached by Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA
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Mark 9:2–9
2 Corinthians 4:1–7

UNVEILING OUR HEARTS

Today is transfiguration Sunday. Long ago when I was an associate pastor, every year when transfiguration Sunday came around, like clockwork, it was the associate pastor's turn to preach—without exception, no matter who the person was. Even when I was in Scotland, I was told, “You preach on transfiguration Sunday.”

To be honest, none of us really fully understand what it meant to be transfigured. We get the explanation—dazzling white. I like the King James version—even fuller folk couldn't make it that bright. But what does it mean? What does it mean to say when a person knows God through Jesus Christ, the good news of the gospel is obvious? What does it mean to say when the gospel is alive in us, it is unmistakable?

I know the gospel has been a part of who Bush Hill Presbyterian is for a long time. But dare I say that I think we are re-learning, if you will, how to talk about that with one another—how to put words together in such a way that we can identify the spirit of Christ in one another, and in the way in which we behave with one another.

Someone has written, “When the gospel is hidden or veiled, it is nowhere.” Bush Hill is a Presbyterian church on Franconia Road. Franconia Road has more churches per mile than any street in the world. Seriously, look it up. *Guinness Book of World Records*. There it is—not Bush Hill, but Franconia Road.

And the apostle Paul is asking us, “What difference does it make for us to be here?” Back in the third chapter, he was very explicit. “When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”

We have turned to Christ. When we turned, did anything change? Has the veil of our hearts been removed? In Psalm 50, God is described as active. I had to smile when I read Psalm 50 this morning because it's one of those psalms that though you may not know it by heart, if you ever had to do sword drills, if you ever had to work at finding a verse of scripture from memory, Psalm 50 is just one of those that you have memorized and you don't even remember it, probably. But the New Revised Standard version has sanitized Psalm 50 for us. It added an indefinite article to make the reading a little easier. In verse 9, it says, “I will not accept a bull from your house.” It's talking sacrifices that were insincere. Even in the Revised Standard Version, not the New Revised Standard Version, but the one before this and certainly in the King James translation, you know the verse. “I will accept no bull from your house.” Now that's a verse any kid can like. It's right up there with the 23rd psalm and other famous verses. It translates and transcends all the time. During Lent, we do well to remember God accepts no bull.

Two weeks ago your elders and your deacons went away together to pray about a very simple question: what difference does being a disciple of Jesus make in your life? It's an amazingly terse question, isn't it?

And we should all immediately know how we would answer such a simple and direct question. But if we are honest, it causes us to pause. It's like the transfiguration. It pulls us up short. It's one of those inquiries that stops us and makes us evaluate and choose our words carefully.

Jesus goes up the high mountain and was transfigured. Then on the way down, he tells his disciples not to tell anyone until he has been raised from the dead. (Okay, Jesus. We won't tell anybody what we just saw because we are really scared to death and don't know what it means. And right, we'll wait till you're raised from the dead because we understand that already!!) Risen from the dead? Come on! The disciples are not supposed to try to explain what it means to be transfigured ... until they can explain what it means to be resurrected. You see, until we understand that, none of us have a clue.

I said the elders, deacons, and I went away for a weekend to talk about—to pray about, actually—that question: what difference does being a disciple of Jesus make in your life?. What differences does being a Christian make in our lives? And though we were together for most of a Saturday, and I guess we talked about it a little bit; but still we didn't say it out loud enough to each other. I left, wanting to hear more about what difference it really does make to the spiritual leaders of this church to be a disciple. I know it makes a difference. I can see it. I can hear it, as our relationships grow; but somehow I was still hungry to hear more.

We do well to set aside enough time during Lent to not only pray about this question, but to actually give voice to what the words mean. Not pat answers—not sales pitches—but true meaning. And I fear that because we don't talk about it enough, we don't have a clue when we are asked the most basic of Christian questions.

Is it because we don't have time to listen to one another, to unveil our hearts to one another? Being a Christian is like turning on a lamp in a dark room. Being a Christian makes us want to deal with our selfishness and with the love that we have for darkness which hides our selfishness. Following Jesus forces me to confront and overcome my tendency to be jealous. As disciples of the risen Lord, I am more likely to recognize the fear within myself—the fear that usually comes out as anger.

Being a Christian makes a difference because we can be free from our selfishness. We can be freed from our jealousy and we can, in fact, learn that Christ's love casts out fear. Unveiling our hearts has to take place with one another. Allowing the light to come out is a learned activity. Yes, I agree with Paul, it's a power—an extraordinary power—that doesn't come from us. However, we are not inherently in tune to letting that light out. In fact, we spend so much of our time being careful not to let it out. We might offend.

Being a Christian means talking and relating to one another in ways which don't block the light. And every time we do, the spirit of Christ promises to bring to our mind the words Jesus said to his disciples: "Don't even try to explain this until you have experienced my resurrection; my rising from the dead." Your rising from the dead bed of sin, from the death-dealing actions that bring darkness back into the story. Rising miraculously beyond our instincts and taking on the nature of Christ, who is in fact, the life that has overcome all darkness.

We are about to say some well thought out sentences, based on scripture, and any one of them could become your answer to the question, "What difference does it make in your life to be a Christian?" Take this bulletin, cut out this passage and put it on your refrigerator and look at it. For this, at least in part, is what it means to follow Jesus.

From the bulletin:

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (Unison)

[A Brief Statement of Faith, Lines 52-76]

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"