

Shining Like the Sun

- [2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2](#)
- [Luke 9:28-36, \[37-43a\]](#)

I don't know about you, but that reading from 2 Corinthians makes me uneasy. It makes me uneasy because it sounds so anti-Semitic, and humans being humans, I imagine that the idea that Jewish hearts are hardened and their understanding veiled has been used against Jewish people through the centuries. Some commentators think that Paul was simply mistaken in his interpretation of Moses' veil and as a result disappeared down a theological rabbit hole.

While that is a handy way to deal with things we don't like in the scriptures, I don't think it's the entire story. I think that Paul was always surprised that everyone simply didn't get that Jesus was the Messiah and tried to understand it the best way he could. Which led him to think that maybe their hearts were hardened or their minds veiled or perhaps that God had chosen ahead of time who would recognize Jesus as Lord and who would not. But whatever he's doing here, Paul is talking about his own people. It would be like me saying that English people have closed minds or that gay people are strange. Since I'm talking about my own people, it's kind of ok for me to say that in a way which it isn't ok for those of you who happen NOT to be English or NOT to be gay. So we cannot consider this passage to be truly anti-Semitic however it might seem or however it might be used by ignorant people.

With that caveat, I do want to talk about Paul's statement that "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 into another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." Let me repeat that: that "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 into another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."

Last fall, some of us reflected together on the teachings of Thomas Merton. You may remember that Merton had an astonishing mystical experience on the streets of Louisville, Kentucky. He wrote:

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world. . . .

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

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Isn't this similar to what Paul is saying?

All of us, with unveiled faces, or open hearts; all of us with open hearts can see the glory of the Lord – it is as though reflected in a mirror because we would shrivel like a moth in a flame if we saw it directly or perhaps go blind, like someone looking directly at the sun without protection... yet all of us, Paul says, “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” We are all walking around shining like the sun.

I’d like you to turn to your neighbors, look them in the eye and say their name then “You are walking around shining like the sun.”

...

Was that uncomfortable for anyone? Why? Because we don’t believe it. But Paul says we are being “transformed into [Christ’s] image from one degree of glory to another.”

And Merton says we are walking around shining like the sun? Why?

Because we are God’s beloveds. Because God calls each one of us into the intimate relationship that James, John and Peter shared with Jesus the Christ: the intimate relationship that Moses shared with God the Creator. We get to have an intimate relationship with God through the grace of God in Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

It’s like the moon who shines with reflected light from the sun – we shine with the reflected light of the glory of God.

But most of the time we’re not aware of it. Most of the time we feel rather dull and even as though there’s a total eclipse and the earth is getting in the way of God’s glory. Because we are attached to the things of this life which are only temporary. As humans we are constantly comparing ourselves to other people, we want to be like them, we want to have what they have... and that takes up our energy instead of putting our attention into imitating Jesus and choosing to be like him.

This is the calling of our baptism – to give up trying to be a success in the world, to give up trying to be liked, to give up trying to be like those we admire and instead to become a new creation, imitating the pattern of Jesus Christ and seeking to be conformed to his image. This is a path that leads not to rivalry and violence, but to building others up, avoiding scandal, preferring one another, empowering the other, and refusing to retaliate against evil, in order that as members of the community of the new creation we break the spiral of violence and become the strands of yarn that by God’s Spirit are knitted into the fabric of love, justice, and peace.¹

This is the path of God’s glory because this is the path that Jesus trod. And this path of God’s glory is ours too. As the disciples heard when the cloud enclosed them and they could no longer see the way

¹ Willard Swartley, “Discipleship and Imitation of Jesus/Suffering Servant: The Mimesis of New Creation,” ch. 11 in [Violence Renounced](#), p. 237. quoted in http://girardianlectionary.net/reflections/year-c/transfig_c/

forward or backwards, “This is My Son, my Chosen, Listen to him!” The more we listen to the teaching of Jesus and study the path that he took, the more the Holy Spirit draws us close to God. The more we turn to God in prayer, meditation and love, the more we are transformed.

And the more we are transformed, the more we get to shine with the reflected glory of God, not just as individuals but as a faith community too. And then we will begin to notice that we are indeed walking around shining like the sun.

Alleluia!