

"The Glory of the Lord"

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, February 10, 2013**

**Old Testament Lesson – Exodus 34:29-35
New Testament Lesson – 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2**

Life is like a bottle of salad dressing. It can get pretty settled if it's not shaken up from time to time. That's why the label on the cap says, "**Shake well** before using." Shaking and usefulness go together. When we get too settled in our old ways of being, that's when God is there to shake us up a bit.

Just like an unshaken bottle has a sour sediment at the bottom, a person who doesn't allow God to shaken things up from time to time gets settled in uninspired ways – ways of being that aren't useful to God or anyone else. In our Old Testament lesson, we heard Mike read about how Moses, one day just like any other day, followed God's lead and climbed Mount Sinai. There God spoke to him face to face, and this really shook Moses up. It changed him. So much so that when Moses came back down the mountain the skin of his face was shining.

Have you ever had a mountaintop experience – something so amazing that it changed you? When the youth of this church go to Estes Park for the LOGOS/GenOn youth conference each summer, they come back changed. You can see it in how their faces shine with a sense of fresh faith.

When a boy enters Scouting, something changes in him. You can see it, not only in his uniform, but in his face. For instance, a scout takes an oath to help other people at all times. As it says in the Boy Scout Handbook "a cheery smile and a helping hand make life easier for others." Notice that the smile precedes the helping hand – "a cheery smile and a helping hand make life easier...." By approaching people with a bright, shining smile on his face, a Scout is sending the message that I'm here to help; you can see it in his face.

When someone joins this church, something changes. You can see it as God awakens in them a sense of fellowship, worship, and service that takes them in new directions and opens them up to new possibilities. And this is often reflected on their faces

Most of you can remember a similar time in your life when God awakened something new and exciting in you, something that called you in new directions and opened you up to new possibilities. In all of these divine encounters, we come out changed, transfigured.

Today is Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday, the day we recall when God removed the veil that separates humankind from the divine. As the Apostle Paul says in our New Testament reading for today, "... Only in Christ is (the veil) set aside. Indeed, to this very day," says Paul, "whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over (the minds of unbelievers); but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed." Paul continues, saying, "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord ... are being transformed into the same (divine) image from one degree of glory to another..." Transformed from one degree to another. Are you being transformed through your faith journey?

Would people looking at you today see something new in you, remark that you've really taken off in a new and exciting direction? Would they see the glory of God reflected in your face?

I sometimes watch the TV show Shark Tank. The Shark Tank is really a panel of investors who listen to pitches for new products. People come to them hoping to get financial support in launching the next big, billion-dollar product or service. In a rerun last week, a guy named Aaron Marino asked for \$50,000 in exchange for a 10% stake in his company.

Marino has developed a six-disc DVD series that helps men achieve the perfect look for success, both in dating and in the job market. To pitch his idea, Marino had a guy dressed rather sloppily transform right before our eyes into a real "go get 'em" babe magnet. Turns out he used twins, so when the slob ducked behind one side of a wall panel his well-dressed, twin brother emerged from the other side. Presto – instance transformation.

It was a really great way to show people what a difference Marino can make in a guy's life. You could see it in the guy's face and how he's dressed and in the way he carries himself with more confidence. He just exudes success and new possibilities.

But of course, the change that Marino's clients achieve is all on the surface. But the change that God achieves in our lives, when God get's a hold of you and SHAKES THINGS UP, we'll, we're changed through and through. And people can really see it, too. Until we settle into our old patterns, forget about how God really grabbed hold of us, and eventually we just stop stretching ourselves; stop trying to seek higher and deeper encounters with God.

If people aren't seeing a difference in who you are as a Christian from time to time, then that's an invitation for you to follow God's lead and climb another spiritual mountain. Maybe your spiritual mountain is teaching Sunday school or starting a new Bible study. Maybe it's serving in the community or through the church. Perhaps your next spiritual mountain is actually a mountain – going on an overseas mission trip or for our youth getting back to the Estes Park youth conference.

Or maybe it's something closer to home, like taking on prayer or meditation as a spiritual discipline; maybe through our two Lenten Taize services; or studying the Bible, doing a daily devotional; or becoming more Christlike in our relationships – more self-giving and gracious and merciful – no matter how hard it can be, and especially how hard it can be if you're a parent.

Humorist Jonathan Katz knows all too well how hard it can be to be gracious and merciful to those we love. "My daughter has me totally wrapped around her little finger," says Katz. "I don't even try to win anymore. I just try (to) save face. I say things to her like, 'Go to your room at your earliest convenience.... Daddy's going to count to fifteen hundred.'"

Now something like that would be a change that people could see on your face. But of course, such changes don't seem to last very long, do they? When we're making an effort to change how our relationships play out, why is it so hard? Or when we've had a mountaintop experience that has us glowing inside and out, why doesn't it last longer?

The answer can be found in our Old Testament lesson. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai and the Israelites saw how his face shined, Exodus tells us that "they were afraid to come near him."

Sometimes our excitement about a mountaintop experience or the change we are trying to make in a relationship just freak people out, makes them uncomfortable. It just seems unnatural to them. But remember, these are divine experiences and Christlike ways of being, so by definition they are not easy for the world to accept. Often our best efforts and most exciting insights are rejected by those we love and know best.

And yet, when the Israelites couldn't quite hang with Moses' new way of being after his face-to-face with God, Moses took steps to work it out. He had important things to share with the Israelites, divine insights from God Almighty, and he wasn't going to let anything get in the way.

So the first thing Moses did was pick and choose who he shared with. Exodus tells us that Moses backed off a bit and regrouped; meeting separately with his brother Aaron and the other leaders of Israel. "Moses spoke with them," says Exodus, and "afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai."

Sometimes we have to pick and choose who we share our divine encounters with, so we don't freak people out. Sometimes we need to back off a bit at first.

The other thing that Moses did was put a veil on his face.

Exodus says, "... The Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with (God)."

With a people as hardhearted as the ancient Israelites and in a world as jaded and skeptical as our world today, sometimes God can only be experienced and accepted through the veil of moderation.

Dr. Chester L. Karrass is the founder of the Karrass seminars on effective negotiation techniques. One of his key points is Karrass' warning to allow enough time when introducing new ideas.

"Introducing new ideas is like introducing new friends," he says. "It takes time to know and understand people before someone else's friends become our friends as well. Therefore, when you introduce new ideas to someone else, you must give them sufficient time to get to know them (the ideas) before you can expect agreement."

Likewise, when we've had a life-changing, mountaintop experience, or when we're trying to change how we act in a relationship, it's a good idea to give people time to get to know us again. Because if we don't, both you and the other person can get pretty frustrated – you, because the people in your life aren't accepting the new you or they're not as excited about life as you are; and the other person, because he or she doesn't know how to take the new you, or maybe there's fear that you're going in a direction that's difficult to follow.

And when that happens – when we get frustrated or they get uncomfortable – the next thing you know, we become reluctant to even seek out mountaintop experiences, or to share them, or to find new ways of approaching our relationships.

And that's when we settle into our old ways of being and give up on growing spiritually, of ever seeing the face of God again; we give up on sharing with others the excitement of our faith life.

If that sounds like you, perhaps it's time for God to shake things up again. You might open yourself up to new experiences that can stretch us spiritually, or outreach projects and religious practices that deepen our faith, or inner journeys and personal commitments that can take you back to the mountaintop, for a chance to see God face to face.

God is always there for us, to help us take on new ways of being, to grow us spiritually and personally, and to guide us when we return from the mountaintop. If we take on such a pattern of experiencing God anew in our lives, and carefully and patiently integrating those experiences into our old selves and our old lives, then God can use such divine encounters to shine light into our darkest corners, to brighten even the gloomiest of faces.

If we open ourselves up to regular encounters with the divine, then God can turn our toughest situations into new opportunities; and

through that, we can achieve lasting spiritual growth and personal happiness. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, you know every secret in our hearts. So it comes as no surprise to you that we struggle with change.

It sounds exciting at the outset, but it is scary to let go of what is familiar and comfortable in order to embrace what is strange and different.

The truth is that we would prefer that someone else change. But, you call us to follow you, not to preserve our own security.

You invite us to care about those who are not part of this fellowship as well as those who are.

You ask us to love, to forgive, and to reconcile – and we will have to change in order to be obedient. Grant us grace and courage to say “yes” to you, even knowing that it will change us.

For we have seen and believe the change – the transfiguration – you caused in our perception of Jesus. That he would walk among us as one of us one moment, and become the full reflection and embodiment of your glory the next.

Help us to achieve such transformations in our lives, in our families, our workplaces, schools and communities.

Prayers:

Help us to follow Jesus Christ as our earthly Lord and heavenly Savior, Jesus, who taught us to pray saying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.