

SERMON - 2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-4:6 – Unveiling the Truth
March 2, 2025, Church of the Good Shepherd

Good morning, Good Shepherd!

Many of you know that much of the worldwide Christian church uses a 3 year reading plan called the lectionary to order worship readings. The lectionary is simply a pre-selected collection of scriptural readings from the Bible that can be used for worship or study and is broken out into years A,B, and C. Part of the purpose of the lectionary is to ensure that over the course of three years the bulk of the Bible is read aloud and to keep pastors from preaching the same passages year after year. This year, we are in Year C, so the last time these passages were read at Good Shepherd was 2/27/22. And guess who the guest preacher was....?

That time, I accused Christine of setting me up, because preaching on the Transfiguration was one of my big no-nos (along with the Trinity and Book of Revelation) but I tackled it, and think it turned out okay. THIS time, I actually picked this Sunday and want to focus on the passage taken from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church.

This is a tricky passage because taken out of context (and it has been) it can seem very critical of the Jewish people and the law of Moses. So, as always, I encourage you to always look at the verses before and after to get a fuller picture of what Paul is trying to say. So, looking at the verses just before this passage, we see Paul comparing the "Ministry of the Spirit" with the "Ministry of Death" – which is how Paul references the Law of Moses. He states that the law kills because it does not have the power to save us – it is only a guide. But the Spirit gives life. And this gives us confidence to act with great boldness. We no longer need a veil over our minds when the Law is read, because we have the fullness of the Law through Christ, and therefore we are free. All of us, with unveiled faces, are being transformed in the Spirit. So, we do not lose heart. We renounce shameful things and refuse to practice cunning "by open statement of the truth."

And there's the rub. To quote Pontius Pilate "What is truth?"

During COVID, my sister moved to Palmyra, VA and I go down once a month for adventure or treasure hunting with her while we explore the surrounding area of her new home. We are both great lovers of Thomas Jefferson, and since she lives about 15mins from Monticello, our adventures often begin or end at his home. And we have learned so much about this complex man who could pen words like "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...*" AND, while president, signed the law abolishing the transatlantic slave trade – yet he himself kept around 130 humans in bondage at any given time at Monticello,

because he believed they were inferior to him and incapable of living independently. That was Thomas Jefferson's truth. This brilliant man of the "Enlightenment". This is so hard for my 21st century mind to comprehend.

Now, Palmyra is the county seat of the mostly rural Fluvanna County so many special events are scheduled right in my sister's own backyard. And there are a LOT, because they are doing a remarkable thing in Fluvanna County: this sleepy little county, in the center of VA, has been hosting a movement celebrating the descendants of enslaved people who lived and died on plantations along the Rivanna River. This, of course, starts with identifying enslaved people and where they worked – but this grass-roots movement is focused on looking forward and highlighting the amazing families that grew out of Emancipation in spite of a century of Jim Crow, voter suppression and systemic racism. This movement has been growing for over a decade, but especially in the last five years.

So, a few weeks ago, my sister and I went to an art show at the Fluvanna County Library which featured portraits of living descendants, aged 12 to well past 90, with narratives highlighting their accomplishments. It was really quite moving. Some were ordinary citizens just living out their lives, while others were artists, poets, historians, doctors, lawyers. About what you'd find in any American community – except the ancestors of these folks started out with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the incredibly tight knit community of the black church. AND they started with the expectation that they would fail because they were somehow inferior to those who held power over them. But Thomas Jefferson and others like him were wrong. Because here we are, 160 years after the end of the American Civil War and we find a rich history of family after family succeeding in spite of all the obstacles thrown at them. And they are celebrating that truth in Fluvanna County.

There was a woman who spoke at the unveiling of this art show that my sister and I attended who said something that truly convicted me. She said "It's easy to look back and excuse the ruling class of any era, by saying 'well, they were men of their time' " I have actually used those words, if only privately, to excuse the founding fathers who were slaveholders. But were they really? Not only did the northern states begin abolishing slavery starting in the late 1700s but many southern plantation owners actually freed their enslaved people after the war for independence. People in Thomas Jefferson's own family, like his cousin Richard Randolph. And William Short, the man who served as Jefferson's private secretary in France and whom Jefferson often called his "adoptive son." Not only did he free all his inherited slaves before leaving for France, he was adamantly opposed to slavery and advocated for freeing all enslaved people.

So, this woman at the art show continued, saying, "in their time, our founding fathers looked back at the lives of people 150 before them, and believed they were so advanced.... So enlightened. Now we do the same thing. We judge people from 150, 200 years ago based on

their culture and ways of thinking, and think we are so much better than they were.... But consider this: 150 years from now, **our** descendants will be looking back at **US**. At the way we lived, the ways we treated people, the things we believed.... What will they see?

What will they see, indeed. What is our Truth?

So, let's look at our Epistle reading again:

Paul writes: **Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.**

So, he tells us right here in verse 16 that "when one turns to the Lord the veil is removed." Ask yourself - If you are having a hard time hearing God's voice in the maelstrom are you turned towards God or away from God?

Paul continues... **Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.**

Are you being transformed? Do you feel truly free? Are you spending any time at all letting the Spirit work on your heart and speak Truth?

Paul concludes: **Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; 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.**

So, how do we find this "open statement of Truth?" By Being In The Spirit. By shutting out the noise. By listening to the still, quiet voice of God.

In the verse immediately following this passage, Paul writes *"⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ..."*

"The god of this age" What are the gods of this age? Many would say Money. Power. Materialism. But, honestly, those are old gods. They've been around as long as humans. One could argue that today it is technology. For me, specifically, I would say it's Information. The accumulation and vetting of what's real and what's fake. In an age of disinformation, this can be a fulltime job. It is so easy to become consumed by the 60min news cycle, trying to stay on top of everything that is happening in our world. Between work and family and doom-scrolling, there's not one single moment left to spend with God. How can I take time in quiet devotion when my watch and phone and desktop computer are all beeping at me with another update??

Friends, if we are going to survive all this noise, all this outrage, all this chaos... We need Jesus, up close and personal. We need to turn off our devices, quiet our minds, calm our hearts, and spend time with the Spirit. Every day. Only then will we hear the Truth with a capital "T".

Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we have to spend time with the spirit for the veil to be removed. We need to be in prayer without ceasing, 1st Thessalonians style: by praying frequently and without giving up, even when you're tired or discouraged. Then you can be transformed.

One of the ways that Good Shepherd is helping its members to quiet the noise is by offering a twice weekly Compline services. How many of you have participated? It's on Zoom, Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 8pm. You can eat your dinner, get the kids to bed, and then join in. It's nothing fancy, just a short prayer service that creates an opportunity for reflection and thanksgiving. You can use your own Book of Common Prayer or download the [Order of service](#) that's emailed each week. What a blessing to be part of a church that offers this kind of ready-made, community prayer time.

Good Shepherd also offers Contemplative Holy Eucharist on Wednesday evenings here in the sanctuary. This provides times for silence and focus on being present to Christ as He meets you in the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. If you have ever been interested in contemplative prayer, this is a great way to start. After the service, we offer anointing for healing to anyone who desires it.

These are both ways to revive your prayer life if you – like me – have found yourself lost in the noise. Staying close to the spirit frees you to live the abundant life that God has planned for you. One where you can be refreshed and have the energy and wherewithal to care for your family, love your neighbor, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned... not because it's a chore or a box to check off on your "I'm a good Christian" list, but because the Spirit has provided everything you need to fulfill God's call on your life.

And one day, say 150 years from now, when your great-great-great grandchildren are looking back at your life they will never find themselves saying, "well, they were just people of their time." Instead, your life will be a testament to your faith, and they will understand Jesus's words "You will know them by their fruit."

To God be the glory.

Amen.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? ²You yourselves are our letter, written on our^[a] hearts, to be known and read by all; ³and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. ⁵Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets,^[b] came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; 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. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"^[c] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

[On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]

