

REVELATION AND FREEDOM

Transfiguration Year C

Ex. 34:29-352; Ps. 99; Cor. 3:12-4:2; Lk. 9:28-36 (37-43a)

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While having a bath one day, the great mathematician and inventor, Archimedes, made an amazing discovery. He discovered the law which states that (and I quote) “a body totally or partially immersed in a fluid is subject to an upward force equal in magnitude to the weight of fluid it displaces.” This is what has come to be known as the Archimedes Principle. This small morsel of trivia may not be of earth shattering consequence to you, but it was to Archimedes and the scientific world of his time. His discovery is mostly remembered by the comment he made at his great discovery, and is one with which most of you will be familiar. Forgetting his state of undress, Archimedes ran through the streets of Syracuse shouting the word “Eureka” which in the Greek means, “I have found it!”

When was the last time you had a “eureka” experience when reading the Scriptures? When was the last time you made a discovery in your Christian faith that caused you to be excited—to be in awe of the greatness of God? I suspect, although have no evidence to back myself up, that for many Christians, such experiences are not a frequent nor indeed a regular occurrence.

One of the exciting things about having to prepare a sermon every week is that every now and then I come across something that I have never seen before or never really understood. The point is that we can *all* have these experiences if we look for them—if we understand the nature of our searching. The more you delve into God’s word, the Bible, the more it reveals to us. When we regularly encounter revelations of this nature, our Christian walk becomes vibrant and exciting.

There are three questions that we need answered if we are to gain this type of experience: First, what do the Scriptures reveal to us about God? Second; how do the Scriptures reveal God to us? And third, what should our response be to such revelation?

And remember, revelation, that mysterious unveiling of truth, is open to all who are in Christ. What was once hidden in the Law, has now been revealed in Christ.

The history of salvation is a history of revelation. “In many different ways and over a period of time”, says the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, God has progressively revealed himself to humankind. In the Old Testament, it was the Law, embodied in the Ten Commandments and given to Moses on Mt. Sinai that revealed the nature of God to humanity. The purpose of the Law, while to provide a guide to life, was meant to reveal the grace of God. The Law displayed the holiness of God and consequently showed people their state of sin. But because they could never fulfil the Law, it ended up condemning them, because it showed them how far short of God’s expectations they fell. This knowledge of sin, therefore, showed up the need for a gracious God, for hope for the future lies only with a God who is able to forgive, since no-one is able to fulfil the Law.

Consequently, the Law points us ultimately to Christ, God’s gracious answer to our sin, who took upon himself *our* sin so that we might be able to relate to God once again. Although the Law was to guide the Hebrew people for the next 1300 years, it was not God’s final revelation to his people. Jesus in his death and resurrection fulfilled the Law, and because Christ revealed the true nature of God completely, this revelation is greater than the Law. The glory of God that was hidden in the Law of the Old Testament is no longer hidden. It has been revealed fully in Christ. While the Law revealed God, this revelation was only partial. Clarity only came with Christ.

Paul points out that the whole business of Moses wearing a veil is bound up with the inability of the people to comprehend the nature of the Law and in particular its temporary nature. The Law that God gave to Moses was never meant to be the last word. It was always to be the vehicle that took the people on a journey of discovery—the discovery of their own sin, the discovery of their need for a saviour and ultimately the discovery of Jesus Christ as that saviour. However, because of the hardness of their hearts, the people were prevented from gaining any advantage from the teaching that was contained within the Law. The Law was in itself full of light but its clarity can only be appreciated when Christ as the heart and soul of the Law and the One to whom the Law pointed.

However, when one sees Christ in the Scriptures, the veil is removed, and we find freedom.

Before a person is “in Christ”, they are bound in their sin and unable to respond to the call of God. Once a person, through belief in the faithfulness of God, enters into relationship with Christ, there is the freedom to say “yes” to God’s call on our lives and the truth of the gospel is revealed to us. We do not reject the Law, but we have freedom from the consequences of sin, and from death. When we accept the revelation of Christ in the Scriptures, the veil is removed. When this happens there is that “eureka” experience. There is openness, confidence and boldness in the faith.

The prophet Jeremiah said that the law would be written in our hearts by the Spirit. When we strive to keep the Law in our own strength, it reveals our sin, but leads to death because we are unable, in our own strength, to fulfil the Law. Our own attempts, therefore, lead us into a theology of “works”, for when failure comes, as it surely will, it seems easier to try harder instead of trusting God. When we look into the Scriptures, however, yes, our sin *is* revealed, but so is the answer to our sin, Jesus Christ.

Paul writes that the veil is upon the hearts of those who fail to recognise the grace of God in Christ. Our hearts and minds are veiled when we do not see what the Scriptures reveal to us about Christ—the grace of God, forgiveness and freedom to respond to God. It is only as we are “in Christ”, through the Holy Spirit, that the meaning of all Scripture becomes clear, for it is God himself who opens our minds to the truth of the gospel. In the revelation that comes through the Scriptures, the work of the Spirit replaces the authority of the written law.

In the Old Testament, the people lived in fear of God’s revelation of himself (hence the veil worn by Moses), but now we can go boldly into the presence of God—through Christ who has now been fully revealed to us in the message of the gospel. And when we have that “eureka” experience—our exciting discovery of the truth of the gospel—we are transformed.

In the Scriptures we find Christ revealed to us as our Saviour. In Christ we see the glory or revelation of God as in a mirror. What we can discover about God is revealed to us in the face or person of Jesus Christ. In other words, we do not see God but Christ, who is the image of God; and seeing Jesus, the image of God, we are progressively transformed into the same image. The agent of this transformation is the Holy Spirit.

Transformation implies just that—a change in all aspects of our life; in our attitudes, our worship and our service. It is to live a life in the Spirit, to worship in the Spirit and to serve in the power of the Spirit. It is to begin to have those “eureka” experiences so impact on our lives that we can never be the same again.

To behold the glory of God in Christ is to be transformed. Like Peter on the shores of Galilee and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, we too will be transformed when we discover the true nature of God in Christ. Once we see the amazing truth of Christ revealed in the Scriptures, our lives will be changed and we will reveal the true nature of the gospel in *our* lives.

In this passage that we are looking at today, Paul draws a contrast between the fading splendour of Moses’ shining face and the permanent splendour of Christ’s. The former ways of knowing God, through the law and the prophets, are fulfilled through Christ. What’s more, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all of us can discover the truth of the gospel, reflect the light of Christ and be progressively transformed into the image of Christ.

Hans Küng, in his book, *The Church*, asks the question, “Has the Church a future, a future in this modern world?...[Yes], if the Church believes, preaches and lives, convincingly and actively, the message of Jesus Christ, then it has a future in the modern world and in humanity.” (103)

In order to do that, we need to have that “eureka” experience—that experience of exciting discovery that comes when we study the Scriptures in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our ministry in the community is validated by the gospel we proclaim—simply by telling the truth of the gospel in every aspect of our lives.

Let us, therefore, take the risk of discovering what the Scriptures say to us concerning Jesus Christ. If you do, you will be challenged. It may cause you to question long held beliefs. It may cause you to change your attitudes or behaviour. But, I guarantee you that just as Archimedes was excited by his discovery, you too will be excited at what you find revealed in the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ.

To him be all glory, honour majesty and power. Amen.