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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
11 February 2024

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Worship Theme:

### **A GLIMPSE OF HIS TRUE GLORY**

This Epiphany season, we have travelled with Jesus from his baptism in the Jordan River to the Mount of Transfiguration. Today, Jesus gives us a glimpse of his true glory. This final epiphany prepares us for the journey of Lent, where we will witness the most glorious work that Jesus would do when he came down from this mountain.

Sermon Theme: **“Unveiled”**

Grace, and mercy, and peace – all these have been freely given to you by God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Everyone loves a good unveiling. There's an excitement in the air, everyone is on the edge of their seats, filled with suspense. Maybe you've been part of an unveiling ceremony or maybe you've seen them online – statues of famous people, priceless paintings, new buildings and places. It's the reason shows like Extreme Makeover and The Masked Singer are so popular. We love the anticipation of the unknown and we can't wait to see the unveiling – what does the “Extreme Makeover” remodeled house look like now?! Who is the singer behind the mask?! We'll find out when it's finally **unveiled**.

What it would be like, though, if the opposite happened? If tv shows were made with the sole purpose of covering statues and paintings, never to be seen again. If “Extreme Makeover” homes were never revealed and no one ever saw the final result. Or if the Masked Singer stayed masked and no one ever found out who they were. Shows like that probably wouldn't be as popular, because that's not how we operate as people. We want secrets revealed, we want visible results, we want to see and behold these things with our very own eyes, and if the whole point is to take that away, we likely wouldn't be very interested.

But what if you didn't know what you were missing? What if you never heard about such tv shows or statues or paintings? It probably wouldn't seem to have much impact on your life – the normal you live is just that: “normal.” The things exist, but because they are veiled to you, you don't know about them, and even if you have heard of them, they're far off and not really part of your normal, so you carry on without giving it much thought or care.

Spiritually, that's what Satan wants for all people on earth. Because God is the Creator of everything, all people are born with the basic knowledge that there is some kind of generic higher power out there – a “god.” We may not always like it, we may try to avoid it, we may even try to become that power, but the fact remains that people (even those who ignore it as hard as they can!) know there is a “god” figure somewhere. The devil doesn't care if people know there is a “god” – he just wants to make sure we don't know the true one. So he uses whatever he can to

keep us from that True God. Satan uses our sinful nature, which naturally rebels against the commands of the Lord and which naturally cares more about ourselves than anyone else. He uses our society and our world which frequently emphasize how important it is to look out for ourselves and our needs above anything and anyone else – we’re hyper-focused on personal things, often placing ourselves and our wants and desires in the number-one-priority slot in life.

With that practice firmly in place, exactly what Paul says in 2 Corinthians happens: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers*. He pulls the spiritual wool over people’s eyes and then tells them that’s just the way life is – that this is normal and this is how everyone lives and it’s perfectly fine because we’re not missing anything important; in fact, we have the best life anyone can! So the devil says.

Logically from his perspective, this all makes sense. Nothing could be worse for the devil than for more people to learn they have a God who loves them, who forgives them, and who wants them to live in his holy presence forever. So *the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is God’s image*. Satan is perfectly happy with a society so focused on individualism and personal demands that it doesn’t even think of looking for God. A society that idolizes “me.”

We don’t have to look too hard to see how effective that is in our world today. Everyone is clamoring to share their opinion, regardless of what the topic is. Everyone is a self-proclaimed expert on everything. We want to make sure the entire world (or at least anyone who will listen) knows what we think and how we feel and what we like and what we don’t like because the refrain we hear over and over again is that nothing is more important than me.

Can you imagine what this activity we’re engaged in right now would look like if that were the focus here? It would be a giant free-for-all, where anyone who has something to say can just get up and say it and if it’s personally about you then even better! We could all stand up and talk about ourselves for a while before getting in our cars and going back home to the rest of our self-absorbed lives. Jesus wouldn’t be talked about because Jesus wouldn’t be necessary – everything we need would be found right here inside of us.

That’s what a veiled gospel leads to. If the message of a Savior from sin is veiled and hidden and everyone is focused on themselves because we’ve all bought the lie that we’re the most important part of the world, then *the god of this age* (the devil, of course) is happy. The more people who buy that lie, the fewer people he has to worry about and attack, because people who are separated from the gospel of Christ are no threat to Satan. If the gospel is veiled, unbelief is the only option, self-absorption is normal, and we wouldn’t even know what we’re missing.

So Paul points out the very serious result of a life like this: *If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* The only possible outcome of a life without the gospel of Jesus Christ is death, not just here and now, but death forever in the unending suffering of hell. Science has made tremendous progress in our world, discovering teeny tiny particles, exploring the vastness of space, and finding

cures for dreadful diseases, just to name a few ways. But I've never read a headline that says "Scientists Discover Cure for Death." That would be the biggest story ever, second, perhaps, only to one other story. The only story bigger than "Scientists Discover Cure for Death" would be "Scientists Discover Cure for Death and Tell No One." If people found out there were a cure for death and the results were hidden, the outrage would be immeasurable. For as long as people have been dying, we've tried to find a way to prolong life and stop death.

This isn't an imaginary headline though. Oh sure, physical death will still happen for as long as God keeps the world turning. But spiritual death has a cure – there's a way to stop it from happening! And for far too long it has been hidden from far too many people. Paul says, "*Our gospel is veiled among those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from clearly seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*" So where's the outrage over that? This is a room full of people who know there is a cure and are specifically benefiting from it! WE HAVE THE CURE FOR SPIRITUAL DEATH!! And yet so often we sit in our little churches and classrooms and homes and wring our hands and say, "Well, we tried telling people once but it didn't work. We invited them to come here back in 1983, but they never did. I would go out and tell people about God, but I'm too young – I don't know what to say! I'm too old – I've already put in my time. I guess you win some and you lose some."

God forgive us. God forgive us for all the times we are too willing to let *the god of this age* keep the veil on the gospel. God forgive us for our apathy and indifference toward the most powerful cure the world has ever seen. God forgive us for thinking more about ourselves than the people who still need this cure.

In those moments, what do we do? We go running back to the cure too. In a world so focused on "me, myself, and I", the radical message of Christianity is this: *We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* We don't go around saying how great we are and talking about all the reasons we're number one. Jesus Christ is the most important, yes the only focus here. *For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God displayed in the face of Christ!*

This is a priceless message, and today on Transfiguration Day, the veil is once again pulled back. In the Gospel account of Jesus' Transfiguration, we catch a little glimpse of exactly who he is and the power and glory he has. While Jesus was on earth, his full glory and majesty as Almighty God was willingly hidden for a time so that he could successfully complete his mission as the Savior of all people. In just a few short days, we will begin again the season of Lent as we follow our Savior's Passion and his journey to the cross of Calvary. Every year, Lent gives us a wonderful opportunity to reflect on and ponder how much Jesus was willing to do in order to save us, and I hope you'll take full advantage of every worship opportunity we get during that time. And because we know how it ends, we also know the glory does not remain hidden much longer. After the cross comes the empty tomb of Easter and the glory of the resurrected Christ cannot and will not be

veiled again. It is there for everyone to see as it is so beautifully proclaimed in the gospel. This gospel is for me and for you and for all people, and no matter how hard *the god of this age* may try to keep it veiled and hidden so that people continue to spiritually perish and die forever, the good news of Jesus is stronger and will not be stopped.

Too many people still don't know what they're missing. So today, just like we do every time we gather here, we rejoice at all the things God's gospel good news accomplishes: God gives you the gift of faith which solidly connects you to your Savior; Jesus forgives every single one of your sins; Jesus gives you the perfect cure for spiritual death, and through faith in him you receive eternal life in God's holy presence; your eyes clearly see the power of his Word and the majesty of his Name; you lift your heart and voice in prayer and praise and thanks to the God of all grace who so lovingly watches over every moment of life; and you have the privilege of standing alongside countless other children of God as together we go out into the world and unveil the gospel all over the place, telling as many people as we can about the Savior Jesus who loves them.

God has *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in Christ* – we rejoice in the life that gift has given us, and now we get to share it with others! The “normal” life Satan tries to sell us is revealed as the sham it is. There's excitement in the air, the suspense and anticipation are over, and the light of God's glory shines all over the place as he presents the perishing with the free gift of eternal life. The Gospel is **Unveiled!** Alleluia – Praise the Lord! Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.