

All: **There he was transfigured before them.**

Liturgist: His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking to Jesus.

All: **Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud:**

Liturgist: This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him. *Mark 9:2-7 adapted*

Silent confession and reflection

All Singing: **“Light the Fire”**

**I stand to praise you, but I fall on my knees
My spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak**

**So, light the fire (light the fire)
In my soul (in my weary soul)
Fan the flame (fan the flame)
Make me whole (make my spirit whole)
Lord, you know (you know)
Where I am (where I am)
So, light the fire in my soul again.**

Liturgist: Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

All: **For we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

Liturgist: Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather we renounce secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

All: **On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.**

II Corinthians 3:16 – 4:2 adapted

Proclamation

All Singing: **532 “Be Still, for the Presence”**

Scripture: II Corinthians 4:1-6

Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 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, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” 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.

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Under the Veil

All Singing: **908 “Christ, Be Our Light”**
Singing verses 1, 2, and 5

Dedication

Prayers of the People

All Singing: **730 “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light”**
Singing verse 1 and refrain, verses 2-3 and refrain

Benediction

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist:	Lynn Hollender
Vocalist:	Helen Van Wyck
Vocalist:	Marjie Coleman
Acolyte:	Kyle, Kristen & Grace Batkiewicz
Liturgist / Vocalist:	Jim Kwasteniet
Prayer:	Nancy Kwasteniet
Sound / Video:	Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister:	Roger Nelson

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Text: II Corinthians 4: 1-6
Title: Under the Veil
Date: 02.14.21
Roger Allen Nelson

Maybe you know this story....

At thirty-six, Ray Kinsella leaves behind the fast track for the slower pace of a farm and a house with a big porch. However, while building a life in the open-ordered-spaces of Iowa, he hears a whispering voice.

Rising out of his field of dreams, he hears the voice.

In the quiet of the night, he hears the voice.

In the heat of the day, he hears the voice.

“Build it and he will come.”

Without understanding why he’s doing it Kinsella responds by turning under his cornfield and building a baseball field in the middle of Iowa. Then no sooner is the field finished when out of the corn mist appears Shoeless Joe Jackson and other baseball old-timers who play on this fresh field.

Kinsella hears the voice again. This time it whispers, “Heal his pain.” Later it whispers, “Go the distance.” So, following the prompting of a voice he can’t ignore he responds to a vision he can’t explain. And all of this makes even less sense to those who can’t hear the voice or see the baseball players.

And therein lies the rub.

Some can see the players – others can’t.

Some can hear the voice – others can’t.

Some can sit on the bleachers under the Iowa sun and watch a game while others see only an empty field that produces no corn.

And, likewise, therein lies the rub.

Some can see the gospel – others can’t.

Some can hear the voice of God – other can’t

Some sit under the light of the glory of Christ while others see only the veil.

Dear friends, maybe that overstates it, or makes it too stark and simplistic, but think with me for a few minutes about the question underneath our text:

Why is the gospel veiled to some? If Jesus is the “yes” to every promise of God, why don’t more recognize it? If Jesus is God’s full self-disclosure how could he be missed or mistaken?

What veil is coarse enough to block the light of God?

What veil is thick enough to muddle the voice of God?

What veil is dense enough to mute the glory of God?

Why is the gospel veiled to some?

I'm not suggesting idle theological speculation here.

This is a keen question for Paul. He's writing to a Corinthian church in conflict, he's under personal attack, and there are emerging questions. This new faith is just finding its feet and in learning how to stand it's struggling with questions of identity, confessional clarity, and its relationship to its Hebrew roots. So, Paul is writing on the one hand to defend his work and his experience, and on the other hand to clarify who and what Jesus means. And in that context the question is important: Why is the gospel veiled to some?

I'm not suggesting idle theological speculation here.

The world is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith mosaic. Our neighborhoods, work places, and families are a blend of confessions, commitments, and cultures. This shrinking and complex global village is a marketplace of bumping, jostling, and clashing civilizations and belief systems. And in that context the question is important: Why is the gospel veiled to some?

I'm not suggesting idle theological speculation here.

The reformed tradition has long emphasized the pervasive power of sin. The gospel is veiled to some because we're deaf through sin, blinded by sin, and dead in sin. Total depravity....

The only way we can hear, or see, or be made alive is by the will of God.
The veil of sin is coarse enough to block the light of God, thick enough to muddle the voice of God, and dense enough to mute the glory of God.
And, the only way the veil can be lifted is by the grace of God.

Again, that's stark, simplistic, overstated, propositional theology, but it's at the heart of our biblical/theological tradition. It makes for stark, simplistic, overstated preaching that makes me squirm and sweat but I haven't figured out how to wrangle or wiggle my way around it.

Paul's writes that, "The god of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel." So, pick your poison. The reformed tradition lays the veil squarely on our sinful shoulders, while Paul references some force of evil of this world, "the god of this age."

I didn't intend to but I was recently trapped in a discussion with a couple other pastors about scriptural interpretation regarding same-sex marriage. For one pastor scripture was an eternal fixed point – inerrant, infallible, and absolutely clear. I suggested that it's also a living library that's subject to interpretation, the movement of the Spirit, and the experience of humanity. Throughout history faithful Christians have read scripture, sought the Spirit, and reached different conclusions.

He dismissed my observation as moral relativism and sentimentality about human experience. In his mind, I had succumbed to "the god of this age," wherein if anything becomes legal it became moral. I was, to borrow a phrase from Nick Wolterstorff, "obtuse or perverse." So, despite almost 40 years of listening, walking with, reading, wrestling and praying about this question the veil was

pulled over my eyes. I went away reminded, once again, that I'm not Christian enough for the church but too Christian for world.

Dear friends, maybe the gospel is veiled by the gods of this age.

Maybe the gods of consumerism, individualism, nationalism, and post-modern relativism blur and block the light. Maybe the gospel is veiled by my own dullness, darkness, and self-absorption. Maybe the gospel is veiled by the vagaries of birth, cultural context, or historical moment.

Why is the gospel veiled to some?

What if we thought about it this way?

Sandi and I got married on a hot day in August. Those gathered sang, "Be Thou my Vision" and I got a little weepy. The Roseland Christian Ministries Choir sang a gospel chorus – full of passion but painfully offkey. Sandi's father surprised us with a limo from the church – provided by the local mortician. Friend and family gathered for a joyful pig-roast reception. And, 36 years later a good deal of that day is mostly a blurry memory of love and laughter, but I clearly remember Sandi's hat.

Sandi's mother wanted her to wear a hat with a veil. Sandi was not so keen on the idea. And yet, when she came down the aisle on her father's arm – under that hat, behind that veil – Sandi's face radiated joy and fear and nervousness and wonder and anticipation and hope and knee-buckling-beauty.

Through the softness of the veil there were no blemishes or hard edges, but there was just enough light to see the shape of love in her face. And then with his big-beefy-hands her dad lifted the veil and we saw one another face to face, and we made our vows face to face.

In this world we only get blurry veiled images of God.

Through the softness of the veil, we see the gauzy outlines of God. We don't see clearly. We don't see face to face. There is more mystery than we like to admit, but there is enough light to see the shape of love. Sometimes we might get struck down and blinded by the light like Paul, but truth be told, most of the time we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror.

Sometimes the veil is more transparent: in transcendent art, expressions of human love, in the illumination of scripture, or moments being overwhelmed by creation's beauty. Sometimes the veil is more transparent: in the mystery of God's sustaining hand in brokenness, or the experience of authentic community, or unexpected expressions of kindness. Sometimes the Spirit of God breaks through in friendships that traffic in honesty and hearty laughter, or through some mysterious mystical encounter. Sometimes the veil is more transparent and we get a clearer glimpse. But for most of us we only get blurry, veiled images of God....

The veil lifting is the work of the Father – one day we will see face to face. The division of who gets how much light is a mystery in the heart of the Father of Lights – one day light will dawn on all creation and all darkness will be driven out. The blurred contours of love seen through the veil, one day will fully reveal the face of Jesus.

And that's the crucial truth.

No matter the nature of the veil, the clearest glimpse we have of God is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So, don't build a booth to hold that moment of illumination, but continue to seek after, look for, and listen to Jesus Christ. For, dear friends, we are free to follow the voice and turn under our cornfields and live in a manner that reflects, illumines, affirms, and shares...

the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

I don't fully know why the gospel is veiled to some, but living with the humility that we don't raise the veil by our own strength or goodness seems like helpful posture to begin with....

At the end of "Field of Dreams," after Ray Kinsella has turned under his field, crisscrossed the country, followed the voice, and been faithful to the mystery, he turns toward the field and sees a lone ballplayer picking up his gear as the others guys disappear into the corn.

Slowly the veil is lifted and Ray recognizes that it's his father who died too young. And they talk with gentleness, play catch with grace, and see face to face. And I cry like a baby every time.

Family of God in Jesus Christ,
until when with unveiled faces we reflect the Lords' glory,
until we see face to face,
may our lives be reflections of the light we experience in Jesus.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," 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.

Amen.