

Unveiling What the Church Could Be
In honor of five years at Trinity

2 Corinthians 3: 12-18

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.

Imagine a wedding. The bride radiant in white. Waiting in the narthex for her cue. Pachelbel's *Canon in D* signals it's time. Her father leans over and whispers, "Are you ready, kiddo?" The bride glides down the aisle toward her new life. But just before she steps through the threshold, she stops. Then her father takes the veil that conceals her face and lifts it. She beams. It is the image St. Paul uses as an invitation for the church: as we step into a new life, he says, be transformed by the Spirit of freedom. With unveiled faces beam the glory of God to the world.

Well, right away we hear the challenge of the invitation: If we are beaming the image of Christ, then it means we are allowing the Spirit to transform us as a church. And we all know how difficult change is for the church. On this exact date, five years ago, a new pastor, and his family of four at the time, stepped through the doors of a church. The pastor? Well, he was a bit green. His ministry legs were wobbly. He made some rookie mistakes. For whatever reason, I was not in class on the day when they taught us that under no circumstances are you to move the furniture in the sanctuary without first asking permission. I thought I'd cleverly move one piece of furniture a month: the baptismal font into the back of the room during Lent, causing some to believe I was more Catholic than Presbyterian. I moved the pulpit that had been in the same place for 50 years from point A to point B. The next month, I moved the communion table up onto the platform, which a few days later magically reappeared back on the floor. Upon reflection, I was trying to find my way. But I remember Dick Patterson kindly explaining to me, "We've been through five pastors in seven years—all of them expecting us to adapt to their way of doing things." A light bulb went off in me. I hadn't considered how you have had to change your way of doing things over and over again. And a new pastor meant things would change again. Even if it's Spirit induced, change is hard.

At the same time, we've also seen what happens when churches refuse to be moved in new directions. The system becomes stuck. Ministries become static and irrelevant. Generations become unengaged or absent. St. Paul says, our traditions are helpful and comforting, but they

can put a veil over the Spirit, concealing God's glory. If you paid attention to what happened with the United Methodist Church this week they voted for a "Traditional Plan"—where they rejected same-gender marriage and denied the recognition of gay clergy—it has been painful. In response there's a cartoon circulating where a church leader is on his knees, praying before a cross saying, "Please Lord, bring more people into your church." Standing behind him as he prays are the LGBTQ community wearing rainbow clothing—sad look on their faces because they have been stiff-armed out. The Spirit is answering the prayer, if only the veil could be lifted so they could see it. How many times have we heard churches praying, "Please Lord, bring us more children!" but then don't ever change what they do to include the children. Or "Please Lord, make us more diverse!" but then aren't willing to open up their style to include the diversity they say they desire. On the one hand, we get it: change is hard. On the other, we've seen what happens when churches refuse to be transformed.

But here's our reality as people of faith: none of us can come face to face with the living God and remain the same. Remember Moses on top of the mountain? God had to shield Moses' eyes because God's glory was too much. The best Moses could do was see God's back end. And as Moses came down the mountain his face was glowing, so the people grew scared because they said, "No one can see the face of God and live." It's true. Remember Jacob at the river Jabbok in a dusk til dawn wrestling match with God? As the sun peeps up over the landscape, it is not Jacob who wants to quit, but the angel of the Lord. Why? Because no one can see the face of God and live. But Jacob was stubborn, and he gazed into the face of glory and it was then he no longer lived as Jacob but was transformed into Israel. Abram to Abraham. Sarai to Sarah. Simon to Peter. Saul to Paul. No one can come face to face with the living God and remain the same.

Over the last five years it is what has happened to me. Every week I look out into your faces and have been let into your lives. I see God's glory beaming through you and I'm not the same. Now, I know the last five years have been bumpy for some of us personally—we've lost loved ones, had health issues, lost jobs, fear and discord have become the new normal. But to our aging members: I realize you might think your glory has faded, but even as you age you are still reflecting the glory of God! A few weeks ago I met with one of our longtime members and asked her what she thought about us hanging a Black Lives Matter banner and she said, "My generation saw the most horrific things to black people, so we should be saying it the loudest!"

To our LGBTQ members: this week was a reminder of the fight you've had to endure just to lift the veil and be yourself. But please know: our church would not be the same without you. I look to your faces and you are glorious.

To our younger adults: you inspire me. Many work full time jobs, some are in the chaos of raising a family. You are trying to navigate an ever-busy world. Still, you show up to work toward justice.

To our children: you will inherit the world and our faith. The wisest decision we have made since I've been here is to have you worship with us and lead us once a month. It has brought us much joy that radiates the glory of God.

You all have transformed me. No one can come face to face with the living God and remain the same. If the next five years are anything like the first five, it is going to be a wild and glorious ride.

Recently, I heard someone say that Trinity has the potential to reflect to others what the church could be. I think it is true. Today, the Spirit has called four new members and their families to help us reflect what the church could be from one degree of glory to another. You are glorious! Thanks be to God for you. Thanks be to God for us.