

## **Sermon for Last Sunday after Epiphany: *Lifting the Veil***

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Today we find ourselves at the end of Epiphany, and about to embark on Lent, and our journey towards Easter. And not only are we in transition between liturgical seasons, but perhaps we are also at a threshold of sorts, in what one of my divinity profs would call a 'betwixted and between' state. The lingering sense of heaviness – the doom, the difficulty, the death - that was brought on by the pandemic seems to be slowly lifting, along with the associated restrictions. But just as we were about to breathe a sigh of relief, we seem to have been bombarded - mentally, emotionally, and spiritually - with a series of disturbing news, including the so-called 'Freedom Convoy' and invocation of Emergencies Act; the confirmation of more unmarked graves near former residential schools; and just in the last few days, the unprovoked military action against Ukraine; and the death of a homeless man in a bus shelter, just a few blocks away from here. I do not know about you, but I find myself holding my breath, even cringing a bit, as I listen to the daily news. And I can't help but wonder, hasn't there been enough chaos, enough pain, enough conflict in our world? What else could possibly happen now?

Today's Scripture passages, on what is known as Transfiguration Sunday, may provide some insight as to 'what else could possibly happen now'. Today's Old Testament and Gospel readings reflect stunning, brilliant imagery of rays of light which are reflections of the glory of God, and describe the extent to which that glory is veiled or unveiled.

In the Old Testament reading, Moses has been (alone) talking with God, and is bringing a set of tablets down the mountain to renew the (old) covenant with the Israelites. It seems that Moses had to cover his face with a veil to protect the sinful Israelites from seeing the glory of God, and the Israelites themselves seemed to be afraid to come close to God's glory; it was too terrifying and dangerous to be in the presence of God.

In the Gospel passage, three of Jesus' disciples (Peter, John, and James) go with Him up a mountain to pray. While they are there, God's glory is unveiled to the disciples, and they hear God's voice confirming who Jesus is, and calling them to listen to Jesus, thus implying that they are invited to be open to being transformed into the image of Christ, in order to fulfil God's purpose in their lives, and the world, under the (new) covenant. Turning to the epistle reading for today from 2 Corinthians, we see the revelation of Jesus' glory is so spectacular that it initiates the transfiguration of all who are in Christ, even those who lived in Corinth. You see, the church at Corinth had been struggling with divisions and quarrels for quite some time. Thankfully, many had repented of their sinful ways and had come back into unity, with the support of their new leader i.e., Paul.

In this passage, Paul claims that even the Corinthian church, which had been in such dire straits, is being transformed to reflect God's glory. Those in Christ now look at Him with unveiled faces. Christ has essentially removed the veil that concealed God's glory, and Christ's removal of this veil cannot help but be a transformative experience, changing those who look on Him to becoming like Him, over time, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Corinthians may not have been the perfect image of God's glory, but Paul knew God had not abandoned them, and His Spirit was still at work in the struggling church.

This brings us back to the question I had posed earlier: what else could possibly happen now? The Scripture passages have provided insight as to how Christ's appearance on earth once lifted the veil in Corinth – but that is not the end of the story! Just as the Corinthians were transformed through the glory of God to do works of love and justice in their community, we too are invited to follow Jesus and do likewise, to continue to do works of love and justice in our own community. On this day that the community of saints celebrates the Transfiguration, perhaps we should pray that we too will see the transfigured Lord in all of His glory, since seeing the glory of the Lord transfigures all who dare to look on the splendor of Christ. How can we, bearing the image of Christ, continue to 'lift the veil' in our times, in our society, in our parish today? What else could possibly happen now in our community, if this parish were to be transfigured, to have so much hope, that we may act with great boldness, as Paul says in 2 Cor 3:12?

There's been a lot of discussion in churches about how the pandemic and the changes it has wrought, while unpleasant, are also opportunities to reimagine and reprioritize and rethink what is God calling us to do now, and reconsider our mission in our community, both now and in the future. According to the lawn sign and website, Holy Trinity Church is a "Sanctuary for the City", and we strive to show God's love for the world by offering warmth, hospitality, care, and support to all our neighbours. But this dear sanctuary is showing its age and its physical infrastructure is in dire need of repair. At the AGM later today, motions will be presented that relate to "restoration and renewal of the church building" and "market sounding of property". As we prayerfully consider these motions, perhaps we should ponder whether we are primarily focused on fixing the structural foundation, and breathing new life into an old building as a home for our congregation - or whether we are also considering this as an opportunity to raise and to transform the spiritual foundation of our entire parish and extend our mission within the community. Essentially, are we resuscitating an old building or could we also resurrect our mission?

Just like the Church in Corinth, Holy Trinity may not (yet) be the perfect image of God's glory, but we trust that God has not abandoned us, and that His Spirit is still at work within us. So – what else can possibly happen now? We can be transfigured by God's love, so that we, with unveiled faces, may continue to be transformed into the image of

Christ. We can continue to bring the good news, the message of light and love and life to the dark places of this world, plagued not only by the pandemic, but by political tension, racial injustice, and war. And we can boldly strive to fulfil the vision of Holy Trinity, to be THE Sanctuary for the City, through Jesus Christ, the Beloved. Amen