

SERMON TITLE: "Called to Let Christ's Light Shine"

SERMON TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (and Mark 9:2-8)

PREACHER: Rev. Kim James

OCCASION: February 11, 2024 (Transfiguration Sunday) at First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

Today holds a lot of meanings and connections. The United Methodist Men served their Fat Sunday pancake breakfast this morning because it's a long-standing tradition that Christians eat up their greasy and sugary foods before the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday. And that day, February 14th, also happens to be Valentine's Day, so we're also thinking about love, as you can tell from the titles of the Bell Tones' musical pieces. Plus, the Super Bowl is today. Some of us may be wearing red because of Valentine's Day, but others are wearing red because you support the San Francisco 49ers or the Kansas City Chiefs. But on the church calendar, today has importance for yet another reason. The Sunday before Ash Wednesday is also known as Transfiguration Sunday, the day we remember when Jesus went up on a mountain, and Peter, James, and John saw divine light radiating from Jesus.

The light of God is a common theme in the Bible. We also see it in our epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians, chapter four, where the Apostle Paul talks about God commanding the light to shine over the earth. Just as God made the sun and the stars, says Paul, so has God "shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Over the past three weeks, we've been talking about our calling as Christians. So far, we've talked about how we're called to use spiritual gifts, called to follow Jesus, and called to fish for people. Today, we hear another calling. On this day when we remember how Jesus' light shone up on the mountain, let's look at 2 Corinthians 4 and consider how we are called to let Christ's light shine.

1—STAY ENCOURAGED/DON'T LOSE HEART

According to these verses, the first way we're called to let Christ's light shine is to stay encouraged, or to say it the way Paul did, "Don't lose heart." Paul knew the importance of this from his own experience.

It wasn't easy being a traveling missionary evangelist. Some years earlier, Paul had travelled to the city of Corinth and had preached to them the good news of Jesus Christ. As some Corinthian people believed Paul's message and converted to Christianity, a fledgling church was born. That was great. There was much cause for encouragement and happy thoughts. And it was great too that Paul was then able to travel on to other locations and start other churches around the Mediterranean region.

Unfortunately, though, after their evangelist and teacher Paul left them, the Corinthian church went through some very hard times spiritually. They began to doubt their faith and the good intentions of their missionary. Through messengers, Paul learned about their significant struggles, and it would've been easy for him to become discouraged. He could've written off the Corinthians as a failed attempt. He could've begun to doubt his own faith and calling. He could've lost heart.

But Paul was able to stay encouraged because he knew that his ministry was not his own. It was by God's mercy that Saul, the persecutor and murderer of Christians, had been transformed into Paul, the missionary of Jesus Christ. Paul would never forget that bright light of Christ which temporarily blinded him on the Road to Damascus, stopped him in his tracks, and gave him opportunity to re-evaluate his life. The reason Paul had become a Christian missionary was because of the merciful intervention and call of God.

So, when things at the Corinthian church weren't going as well as they might have, Paul didn't lose heart. He knew that the light of Christ was still shining. He knew that God's transforming mercy was still available.

Do you see what this means for us? When your kids are misbehaving and you think that you've failed as a parent, don't be discouraged. When your boss is getting on your case and you feel stressed out, don't give up hope. When your bills are stacking up and you don't know how you're going to pay them, don't despair. When your poor health prevents you from doing what you want to accomplish, stop frowning. Our salvation isn't dependent on us alone. The mercy of God can and does make a difference. So don't lose heart. Stay encouraged. Let Christ's light shine.

2—BEHAVE ACCORDING TO GOOD CONSCIENCE

Christ's light shines through us when we're encouraged by God's mercy. A second way we're called to let Christ's light shine is by behaving according to good conscience. In 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul says, "We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God." In other words, we let Christ shine when we stop doing things that are wrong, and when we start doing things that are right.

You may remember the Hank Williams' song that goes,

I saw the light, I saw the light.
No more darkness, no more night.
Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight.
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.

The third verse of that song goes like this:

I was a fool to wander and stray.
Straight is the gate and narrow the way.
Now I have traded the wrong for the right.
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.¹

To let Christ shine through us, we have to be willing to trade the wrong for the right. We must turn away from those behaviors and habits that are displeasing to God. When we rid our lives of shameful attitudes and actions, then we'll be able to tell the truth. We won't have to hide our light under a bushel basket; we'll be able to let Christ shine.

3—PROCLAIM JESUS AS LORD

So, we let Christ's light shine when we are encouraged by God's mercy and when we behave in good conscience. But Paul doesn't stop there. In verse five, Paul writes, "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord." So, the third way Paul suggests we let Christ's light shine is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.

Because Paul became a great missionary, with a record of evangelistic success, he could easily have gotten a big head, started a television ministry, and travelled around the Mediterranean on a Carnival cruise ship. But instead, Paul humbly considered himself a “slave” to Christ and the people. He never wanted the message to be about himself. He always wanted it to be about Christ.

For about 20 years of my ministry, I served on either our United Methodist Board of Ordained Ministry or the District Committee on Ministry. At those meetings, we would interview ministerial candidates about their faith and theology. One of the most important questions we asked was, “What does it mean to you to say that Jesus Christ is Lord?” Before we could give persons the authority to preach, we had to make sure that they knew who Christ is, both for themselves personally and for the world.

To proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord is to know that he lived his life as both divine and human. To proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord is to believe that his death was tragically real, and that his resurrection was miraculously powerful. To proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord is to accept him as one’s primary teacher, example, savior, and judge. To proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord is to have experienced his life-transforming mercy and to be dedicated to serving him in whatever way he requires.

Now, if you think that’s just for ministerial candidates and preachers, think again. All Christians are called to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. Whether we do it by public speaking or by private conversation, whether we do it by serving food at a homeless shelter or by tutoring children in the public schools, whether we do it by helping a neighbor care for her yard or by giving a hand to a relative in need, we proclaim Jesus Christ by focusing on Christ—first and foremost. To be our Lord, Jesus must be at the center of all that we do and all that we are. When we allow Jesus to be Lord of our lives, then we will let Christ shine for all to see.

CONCLUSION

There’s a[n old] story about a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer, and he started out on

his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an [elderly] woman. She was sitting on a park bench, staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the [elderly] lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him.

Her smile was so [radiant] that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, yet they never said a word. As the afternoon faded into evening, the boy realized how tired he was, and he got up to leave. But before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the elderly woman, and gave her a hug. [And] she gave him her biggest, [most glowing] smile ever. When the boy opened the door to his [house] a short time later, his [own face was beaming with joy. His] mother [noticed right away and] asked him, “What did you do today that made you so happy?” He replied, “I had lunch with God.” But before his mother could respond, he added, “You know what? She’s got the most beautiful smile I’ve ever seen!”

Meanwhile, the elderly woman, also radiant with joy, [began walking to her] home. Her neighbor [saw her and] was stunned by [her shining] face, and she asked, “What did you do today that made you so happy?” [The woman] replied, “I ate Twinkies in the park with God.” But before her neighbor responded, [the woman] added, “You know, he’s much younger than I expected.”²

When people look at you, what do they see? Do they see the encouragement of God’s mercy? Do they see the behavior of good conscience? Do they see the Lordship of Jesus Christ? It’s time to take our little light out from under the bushel and let it shine. The message for us on this Transfiguration Sunday is that we’re called to let Christ’s light shine.

¹Written January 1947, c. 1948, renewed 1975 Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music.

²Adapted from *Dynamic Preaching*, Jan-Mar 2000, p. 56.