

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



2 MARCH 2025

TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS



VEILED??: 'THIS IS MY CHOSEN SON, LISTEN TO HIM?' Luke 9:35b

WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are. We join with them all.

Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

From a cloud, and in a crowd, God speaks to us.

Calling us to be lovers of justice, to share hope with the broken.

On mountaintops, and in neighbourhoods, Christ calls to us.

With a word, and with wonder, moulding us into who we are.

On the playground, and at the workstation,
the Spirit whispers in our hearts.

**Gathering up our fears, as well as our dreams,
and offering them to God.**

Thom Schuman

HYMN TiS 474: Here in this place

PRAYER OF ADORATION / CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

ADORATION:

Let us pray

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Light and life are your gifts, Lord.

May your Light draw us on, Jesus.

Jesus, Light of the world, draw us on
to give all that we treasure, to you,
and to give ourselves as well.

Grant us ‘The Light of the world’ who gives us light that never ends:

to show us the way

to shine before us

to encourage us,

to shine through us for others,

leading them to find its source themselves.

This is light, true light; the ‘Light of the world’;

the light which shows the way of transformation, peace, hope, justice and forgiveness;

love in a darkened world;

and the way to God, Father of us all

Amen

CONFESSION

We make our confession

Dear Lord even as we prepare ourselves to encounter you the living God of Light, in reality,...

...we are not ready to meet you!

Your Glory is too bright.

Your mission is too hard.

We doubt instead of trust.

We act confused instead of engaged single-minded following,

We thrill with the mountain top experience,
but lose our vision when we return to the plain.

We are too preoccupied with our concerns and unable to listen to your voice, nor see your glory:

Forgive us Lord.

We are not ready for your Glory:

Prepare us, for we are lost without your transforming Light and life.

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Amen

PARDON

Our hope is in Christ Jesus. For his sake our sins are forgiven. In him the veil of God’s glory is lifted and we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. Through the power, love and mercy of the Holy Spirit we are now engaged in the ministry that brings glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So I declare to you : Our sins are forgiven

Thanks be to God

SCRIPTURE: Read by Warwick Barry

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

EXODUS 34:29-35

²⁹Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³²Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2 CORINTHIANS 3: 12-4:2

¹²Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³not 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. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And 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.

^{4:1}Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We 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.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

LUKE 9:28-36 (37-43a)

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴²While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

⁴³And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

SERMON: Thinly Veiled!

Some years ago, I was driving our son Paul to the Caulfield station early in the day. It was a sweltering day, and the sun was already very bright. As I turned out of Taronga Rd into Dandenong Rd, there was a report on the radio. The weather reporter on the radio asked the drivers crossing the West Gate bridge to be very careful because the sun glare was very bad – and at that very moment, blinding sunlight hit me. I was blinded, dazzled by the brilliance of the morning sun. For the next few seconds I drove by memory, squinting desperately and hoping no one did anything unusual. I must admit to a moment or two of fear and panic.

The odd thing about all this light was that instead of allowing me to see, it blinded me. All that light was like a veil that prevented me from seeing the road. Now this has become very real for me since I recently had cataract surgery in my left eye. On Wednesday I am having the same surgery on the right eye. Now I find myself overwhelmed – sometimes blinded by the extra light I am seeing! Previously, I had a cataract veil in place!! And hopefully next Wednesday both my eyes will be un-veiled!!

Today I want to look at two aspects of "seeing." That is, "Unveiled seeing!" Let me begin by posing a question:

Why is it that often in our Christian journey our sight of God and God's paths for us, are veiled?

What is it that veils us? What prevents us seeing and following? What blocks out the radiance of God's love from our daily Christian journey?

Let's step back a little!

This image of the veil blocking the light – blocking our seeing - comes from Moses' journey up Mt Sinai to receive from God the 10 commandments. The glory of God shone so brightly that Moses' face had to be covered with a veil, otherwise the dazzling light and radiance of God would blind him. In fact, back then the people believed that it was impossible for anyone to look upon God's radiant face and LIVE!

Now what Saint Paul suggests in his second letter to the people of the church in Corinth, is that long after Moses is dead and gone, the people continue this tradition but in a self-serving way. Not now veiling up as a mark of respect and necessity towards God. But rather metaphorically hiding from God behind a veil. In this way they keep God where they wanted God to be! Hidden! Distant! Under their control! Side-lined by religious laws or practises! However, St Paul claims that for the people of Corinth and indeed, all people of faith, this sort of veiled distant God is no longer a possibility! He says:

'To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read a veil covers their hearts. (vvs 14 and 15.)

Now one has to be careful here not to take all these references to veils etc, too literally. As always with scripture, we need to struggle with the meaning for those who first heard these words before we attempt to apply that meaning to our own lives.

The image of the veil is the image of a barrier that prevents one seeing the full picture. It is something by which one avoids understanding the full nature of God. In effect Paul is saying: 'Take a good close look at God, not some blurred, distorted, half-hidden self-centred image of God.'

You see the people of God in Corinth (and many other places as well) since that first dazzling encounter with God through Moses, have forsaken real knowledge and love of God, left it hidden behind, veiled beneath a set of religious practises and achievements.

Let me illustrate here with reference to my experience of Indonesian culture. Earlier in my ministry I was the Minister of the Malvern UCA which had an Indonesian congregation. So, I went on several trips to Indonesia, to visit sister congregations of the UCA there. I found in Indonesia, on the one hand, that there was a notable 'unveiled' understanding of God. Let me explain. When visiting a village near Jog Jakarta I went to a combined meeting of the local religious leaders (Islam, Christianity: Protestant and RC, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). They had gathered to discuss some inappropriate actions by an American Evangelical Christian Group which was aggressively evangelising locals. I cannot remember the final agreement (most of the conversation was in Bahasa and I was still learning the language) but their respect for each other and their level of co-operation was very inspiring. I also visited another Muslim village which had been badly affected by an earthquake and one of our UCA sister Christian congregations in Jog Jakarta had entirely funded the complete rebuild of the village Mosque and many of the inhabitants dwellings. We were received warmly by the local Iman and members of the community and treated to a feast in their new mosque.

On the other hand, the veil was also well and truly in place among others in Indonesia. Let me explain. I was privileged to meet with the General Secretary of our UCA sister denomination the GKI for lunch (The GKI has well over a million members). I gave him and his young family a good laugh as I tried hard to converse in Bahasa. We ended up speaking in English (he was fluent!) He told me that that Synod in that area of the GKI had to have a large line-item in their Synod budget for rebuilding churches which had been burnt down by extremist Muslim groups, particularly in the state of Aceh.

Now my point is this. On this occasion, it was fanatical fundamentalist Muslim groups who, took the love of our one God, who Muslims call Allah, and violated it! But all the while hiding their actions behind their own set of selective religious practises rules and rights. In such situations the true nature of God is completely distorted and perverted by a thick veil of prejudice, hanging over the minds and hearts of such fanaticism. Such

zealots of whatever religious persuasion create fear, hurts and division, not only among others but in themselves as well, as they 'sell their God-given gift of humanity short.'

And lest we relax and believe that it is only 'them,' not us, who fall into such a trap, think again!

In the Uniting Church in Australia, we ourselves manage to put on some pretty thick veils too! For example, in regard to our worship. On the one hand we can become so slavishly bound by correct liturgy and practises that worship loses all of its zest and living heart; or on the other hand we can create worship that is little more than a lecture on psychology or politics and reflects nothing more than our own wishes and aspirations and certainly not the gospel.

There are many other 'veils' that distort or prevent our 'seeing' God in his full glory.

Success is one such veil. Focusing on our own self and our own needs or should I say, 'wants', exclusively. Or living out life in the ways of apathy – not giving a damn about anything that does not serve our own ends.

Sometimes we wear veils of which we are not even aware. Like turning a blind eye to justice issues, violence against women, political activism etc. Blinkers, veils! Well of course, the truth is that God wants us to know God's COMPLETE glory. All of his astonishing graciousness! The sum of his love! The fullness of his hope and peace! Not just what we can fit in 'when we have time!'

For us the veil has been lifted. For all humanity, the veil has been lifted! Now there is no need to play 'hide and seek' with God, nor the state of being where we are captured or enslaved by our own distorted images of God.

No more veils! How! How is this possible?

A word from our gospel reading:

'A voice came from the cloud, saying to his disciples, 'this is my son, whom I have chosen, listen to him!' 'My son, my chosen. listen to him.'

And from the epistle:

'But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.'

Only then is our vision of God unimpeded. Truly "SEEING!" By turning to the Lord.

'Listen to my son, listen to my son!'

If we truly listen to God's Son, we can no longer hide behind a convenient veil, like betraying our Sunday declaration of forgiveness while cheating the tax man or abdicating family responsibilities, ignoring the many calls to become involved in working for justice or neglecting a neighbour, failing to forgive and adversary etc etc etc.

So, our calling?

No half hearted, thinly veiled effort to be a daily disciple of Jesus Christ but rather, full-on commitment, of all I am and all I represent.

I HAVE SEEN THE UNVEILED, COMPLETE SPLENDID AND WONDER OF GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE IN THE GLORIOUS FACE OF JESUS - I CAN NO LONGER LOOK AWAY!

'¹⁶but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁸And 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;

^{4:1}Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We 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.'

2Cor 3:16, 18, 4:1-2

Let us pray

HYMN TiS 234: How good Lord to be here

PRAYERS of PEOPLE: Prepared by Di Richter

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle.

Prayers for World & Community

A mountaintop encounter, shining like the sun in the kin-dom of heaven, our past, our hope, and our reality coming together as one. We thank you, O God, for this glimpse of your glory.

We thank you, too, for the other glimpses you have given us — in your creation, in your children, in our community.

Today we pray for those who struggle to see, that your light may shine on them, revealing your presence in the midst of all the challenges of this life, shielding them from the shadows of mind and heart, shadows of injustice and violence, shadows of anxiety and illness, shadows that threaten to overtake and crowd out your presence and your care.

Let your light reflect from your face to theirs.

We pray today for those who have fallen into fear, despair, or isolation, who have been overcome by the circumstances of life, pushed or trampled by others, ignored or left out or left behind. And we pray for the groups and organisations, such as Uniting that seek to provide support and change lives for the better.

Reach out your hand, O God, and touch them with your courage and peace, that they may be strengthened to stand in your power.

As we approach the season of Lent, we pray today that you would raise an expectation in us to encounter you each day, encouraging us to be intentional in meeting with you, talking and listening to you.

We ask these and all things in the name of the One who calls us to lay ourselves aside to take up his abundant life, even now, Jesus the Christ.

And we pray together as Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Adapted from Figtree Worship Resources
<https://figtreeworshipresource.blog/>

HYMN TiS 675: Lord, the light of

DISMISSAL:

Go forth now, as lovers of the justice of our God.

**In cyber clouds, and in crowds of those searching for grace,
we will offer the hope of the One who cares for all.**

Go now, as those who have been with Jesus on the mountaintop of wonder,
to serve others in the broken valleys of life.

**With words of life on our lips, with the wonder of laughter in our hearts,
we will follow Jesus to all who seek healing and love.**

Go now, as those who would offer the Spirit's peace to those around us.

**Teaching games of cooperation and not competition to kids,
listening to the lonely whispers of those with whom we work,
we will bring reconciliation to those who are strangers to hope.**

(c) Thom M. Shuman

BENEDICTION:

Christ the Son of God be manifest to you,
that your lives may be a light to the world;
and the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you always

Amen.

POSTLUDE

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational
information on the church website.

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Presider: Rev Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Thursdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES