

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2,
Transfiguration/V-Day C

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True Love Unveiled

Dear beloved in the Lord,

I was talking with a friend at Pastor's Conference about some of our classmates and the things we did. You know, when you go to an all-guys school and you live, work, and play around the same guys every day – you get to know each other pretty well. And we decided, that knowing all we knew about ourselves and all the other guys at the school – for all of our faults, there was one thing we all did amazingly well. We all married up. We married above ourselves.

I mean, most of you have met my wife, and I wouldn't be surprised if, when you did meet her, and especially when you got to know her, you were a little surprised. Don't tell me none of you ever asked the question: "How did *that* guy end up with her? She's way out of his league. What, did he bribe Cupid or something?"

You want to know the secret? I didn't even know until I heard her talk about it years later. As far as I can tell, the secret was little kids on the playground. And the thing is, it wasn't even planned. You see, for our first date, she was going to meet me at my parent's house, but she was early. When she got there, I was still up at the playground at our church with my little sisters, and my mom sent Janette there to find me. Apparently, playing with my sisters won me some pretty big first impression points, and even cutting her with my ice skate later that day didn't convince her otherwise. She was hooked.

But think about that on this Valentine's Day, when the world is thinking about love. Why do people fall in love? Why do they pick *that person* to be smitten with? I'm sure you've wondered that about some couples. "What does she see in him? What does he see in her?" You see, that's the key – they SEE each other. They see something that others might not. They see past all the obstacles. They see some quality that might not be obvious to everyone else. And that quality can overcome all the others that the rest of us are looking at and scratching our heads over.

That's the same situation when it comes to the most important love of all – when it comes to the love between God and man and between us and Him. That's the same thing that happens when it comes to each of our individual relationships with God. So many people don't have a good one because something is blocking it. So many people don't know the love of God; all they know is fear, or apathy, or indifference. It's because they haven't seen God. There's something blocking them. Well, on this Transfiguration Sunday, the culmination of the Epiphany Season – God wants to show us His love. He wants to show us who He is.

That certainly happened on the mount of Transfiguration when Jesus shone like the sun and the Father beamed and boomed his approval from heaven. And in our sermon text, Paul reminds us how that happens in our hearts too. **True Love is Unveiled.** Hear now Paul's words to the Corinthians in his second letter to them, chapter 3. **12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for 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. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But**

whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. NIV 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² 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 every man's conscience in the sight of God.

This is God's Word. Paul says we are very bold because of the hope, the confidence we have. I know I was only bold to ask out my wife because I had told my roommate to punch me in the stomach as hard as he could if I didn't have the boldness to ask her out by the end of the phone conversation. That was just my way of setting up something I feared more than rejection.

Thankfully, this boldness Paul talks about is different. It's a boldness based on hope, certainty, confidence in who God is, and he is always yes. You see, Paul tells us that the veil has been removed for us. Our Old Testament lesson gave us the background to this veil he's talking about. You see, when Moses would go in and speak to the LORD, his face would shine. But then, when he left, the glory would start fading away, so he wore a veil so the people didn't see that. The perfect law that God gave was always diminished by humans. Its glory fades when we don't keep it.

So trying to see God through the law...through his anger over sin...through his wrath – that is tough. It wouldn't make any sense to love him, and love from him makes even less sense. And yet, that's still how the Jews of Jesus' day and the Jews of Paul's day, and the Jews of our day try to see God. But it's not just them. Think of how many people think about God and religion, and have a bad taste in their mouth. Every world religion comes down to the rules. "You do this and do that and then it will all work." But that's the veil; that is what our human nature wants to make it about. Isaiah had warned the Israelites that if they refused to see God for who he was in his Word... **"So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule...so that they will go backward."** Even Christian denominations keep bringing it back to obedience. "If you love God you'll do this, or to get love from God, you'll have to do that." But it's not just them, either.

Look in your own heart. How often haven't you boiled down your view of God and church to "What do I have to do?" When you look at your offerings or your service as burdens, as a "have to" – you're veiling who God is – to yourself and to everyone who sees you. Not only does that put a bad taste in their mouth, but you keep that up and you'll forget why you loved him in the first place. And that divorce is far more painful than any other. It causes you to lose everything...eternally.

But, did you notice what Paul wrote? Verse 16: ¹⁶ **But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.** Then later, **"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."** That so-human veil of trying to earn love by what you do is taken away in Jesus. Like Jesus told Philip, **"Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father"** (John 14:9). Like John wrote: **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him"** (1 John 4:9). Jesus came to show us who God is. He came to let us see past all the obstacles our hearts put up against God, past his out-of-this-world power our hearts testify to, past his anger over our sins our consciences scream – he came to show us the love in his heart. Sure the world may not see why we love God like we do – but we see. Just like we might not understand what some couples see in each other because we can't see what they see. Unless you see Jesus, you'll never understand this love of God.

Think about the person in this world you've fallen in love with, and tell me if you don't have every reason to love your God more...

Do you love because of the gifts he gives? What greater gift could be given than God giving his only begotten Son?

Do you love because of the looks? There's nothing more beautiful than the face of Jesus in all his glory we got to see on the Mount of Transfiguration in our gospel lesson.

Do you love because of the way your beloved deals with kids? Jesus said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." And we see him so clearly dwelling in the hearts of those kids that gather here each Sunday.

Do you love because of what he's willing to do for you? Jesus took more than a few punches defending you. He stretched out his hands and sacrificed his life because he thought you were worth it.

Do you love because he lets you unload on him? Jesus took all your sins, all your guilt, all your sorrow, and he says, "Cast all your anxiety" on there too.

Or do you love because of his success? Through Jesus we are more than conquerors because of his victory over death and the devil and the grave.

Or do you love just because of a feeling? No. Your love is so more than that. You love because he loved you first. He showed you what love is.

The veil is removed. We can see God's love. And now, Paul writes, we get to show that love too. Look at verse 18: "**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lords' glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.**" Remember how before, I said that so many people have a bad taste in their mouth about religion because all they can see is the veil of the law. We get to take that bad taste out of their mouth – reflecting God's Love. In other words, we get to show them love, so that we can show them Jesus.

That removes the veil. May God bless us to reflect his glory and his love more and more! In Christ, Amen.