

2 Corinthians 3:4 - 4:6 ⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. ¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. ^{ESV} 2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Spirit

A few months ago I had to go to the blood lab to get my cholesterol checked. Things went as usual. When I arrived I went to the washroom because you never know how long you'll have to wait and I have this neurotic fear about them calling my number while I'm otherwise occupied. After that, I went in and got my number and sat and read until they called my name. Then, I went back to the little hallway where the little rooms for drawing blood are to stand and wait again. While I waited a man using those walker canes came and stood and waited with me. The book I was reading was entitled *The Foolishness of Preaching: Proclaiming the Gospel against the Wisdom of the World* by Robert Farrar Capon. I was not aware that I holding the book in such a way that only the first part of the title could be seen – *The Foolishness of Preaching*. The man saw it and smiled and remarked something along the lines of Romans 10:14 like how can they believe without someone preaching to them. I was going to remark to him that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, but they called the next person, me to go in. I tried to get him to go ahead but he wouldn't. We smiled at each other knowing that he knew that I knew that he knew I must be a minister and that I knew he must be a Christian too. Well, they drew my blood and I went back out through the lobby. It is a very multi-ethnic lab and as I walked through there were many elderly Muslim women sitting along the aisle and they all just looked at me in horror. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Was my book facing out or something? But just as I stepped out the door of the lab an Asian man looks at me rather sternly and says, "Your fly." I was not aware that I had not XYZ-ed when I was in the wash room.

We never know the effect our externals have on others. I know this is a bit crude of an example. Yet, my unawareness of how I was carrying my book told that man I was a Christian and my unawareness of my carelessness in the washroom told those women that I was offensive. So there you go; I am an offensive Christian unaware of the effect I have on others. But, I might be in good company here. Moses was at first quite unaware of how he was freaking the people out because his face was radiant, shining, or glowing with light because he had been in the presence of the LORD and spoken with him. He eventually had to wear a veil to keep from looking so hinky. His relationship with the LORD was having an affect on God's people by a transforming of his outer appearance in a way he had no control of. The glory of God was shining from him. The word for glory in Hebrew means weightiness or felt presence. People were experiencing God by means of him.

Well, our passages today, the typical Transfiguration Sunday passages, have the common message that being in the presence of the Lord and in relationship with him has an effect on us that we are unaware of through which God himself affects others. Paul in 2 Corinthians culminates this message by leading us down the path of seeing that because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us we all reflect the Lord's glory; and, the Holy spirit is also at work in us transforming us into his likeness so that we reflect the image of God.

The Spirit gives life, a new life that is filled with knowing God, with knowing the steadfast love and faithfulness of God the Father as Jesus, God the Son knows it. It is life that knows that no matter what we have done or may do or what we have left or are continuing to leave undone, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. You see, forgiveness isn't a transaction that was completed by Jesus where God simply makes the verdict saying, "Because of Jesus' faithfulness you people now have my forgiveness." Forgiveness is rather a new state of being in which we cannot be separated from God anymore. We are reconciled to God by being in union with Christ in the Holy

Spirit. Think of it this way. When God the Son became human as Jesus of Nazareth taking to himself our fallen human nature that is separated from God and dies and then died with that nature and was raised in new life because of his faithfulness, he opened up a hole in our old nature into which he and the Father could pour their love into us as the gift of the Holy Spirit (get it hole/Holy). Now, by the free gift of God the Holy Spirit in us each and in our Christian fellowship, God is transforming us each into the image of Christ and us together into the image of the communion of the Trinity, of persons who mutually give themselves to each other in self-giving love. The light of the glory of God is shining through us because God is in us and therefore by means of us each and of our fellowship people are affected by God in ways we haven't a clue about.

There's a story about Francis of Assisi and another young monk who came to live at his monastery. The young monk was quite zealous and wanted to go into the neighbouring village to proselytize. Francis took him aside one day and said let's go to the village and proselytize. Down the hill they went and they walked from one end of the town to the other and then turned around and walked through the town again to return to the monastery. When they left the town the young monk asked Francis when they were going to preach to the people. Francis simply answered, "We just did." Francis wanted to teach the zealous young monk that God is working through him in ways that he is not aware of and furthermore it was crucial for the monk to draw near to Christ in prayer, worship, and study so that the Spirit can transform him more visibly into the image of Christ. For us as individual Christians and as a church we will not grow apart from each of us being a passionate about our relationship to Jesus in the Holy Spirit and through Jesus to the Father in Spirit. Part of the work of the Spirit is to make us hunger and thirst to know righteousness; to know ourselves rightly related to God, to experience his steadfast love and faithfulness. The Spirit us also quenches that hunger and thirst in a way that becomes visible to others. I don't know if you folks have had the experience of looking into the eyes of someone who is very devout. There is something different there.

Back to Paul, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity has given to us the ministry of the Spirit and he has indeed made us competent in it. At 3:6 Paul says God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant. And it is a ministry that brings righteousness. This ministry is quintessentially God's work and we are simply participants in it. Our competence is Jesus' own competence.

For me to hear that the ministry of Christ's church is quintessentially God's work that I with all my faults and indeed sinfulness simply participate in is good news. It means that I, you, and we are off the hook when it comes to saving ourselves and this church. The future of our selves and this church is in the steadfastly loving and faithful hands of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also means that the Trinity is at work in us in a way that we are unaware of and have no control over. The Triune God of Grace is going to do in and through us what he is going to do and I will even say in spite of us. The ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of the New Covenant, indeed, the ministry of Righteousness is not in our hands. We are the living proof that God's will will indeed be done on earth as it is in heaven no matter that God's people who are supposed to do his will are essentially unfaithful and on a good day when we are trying to be faithful we are limping at best, breaking wind when we should be being blown by the wind of the Spirit. And then, something we don't like to talk about, but in the New Testament those who were really victorious in Jesus, were suffering and even dying for him. The good news of the Good News for us who have heard it and have been given the gift to believe is that the administration of this new covenant and the new life and the righteousness of God is out of our hands and utterly in God's hands. If we are at a loss as to how to live and proclaim the Gospel in our neighbourhood, well then, it's up to the Trinity to do it and to show us how.

And this brings me back to St. Francis and the zealous young monk. When they walked through Assisi that day they were wearing brown tunics and had the tops of their heads shaved to tell the world that they were devoted to Jesus and his purposes. Their simply walking through the town said to the people that God's people were in their midst, truly that God was in their midst, and given that some people will think that this may or may not be a good thing; regardless of that, there were those who would see these two oddly dressed men and hear and know that God was in their midst. Nevertheless, we are not completely off the hook when it comes to the ministry of the Spirit. We still have to wear the tunic so to speak. We still have to participate in the ministry that the Spirit is doing in us for the world. We still have to beg for the passion of knowing the Lord. We've still got to immerse ourselves in Scripture. We still have to die to ourselves for our brothers and sisters in the Lord and for the world around us. We must wear the tunic and through that the Holy Spirit will do his ministry of shining. Amen.