

“A NATURAL LOOK”

II Corinthians 3:12-4:2 March 2, 2025

Priyanka Chopra is an Indian actress, singer, film producer, philanthropist and the winner of the Miss World 2000 pageant. She is one of India's highest paid and most popular celebrities. Priyanka has worked mainly in Bollywood but has also ventured into Hollywood. In December of 2018 she made headlines when she married her fiancé, actor and singer Nick Jonas. Of course, they had a lavish multi-day wedding celebration befitting the stars of today.

However, what caught my eye was Ms. Chopra's wedding dress and veil. They were both designed by the famed fashion designer Ralph Lauren. It took over 1,800 hours to make the two pieces. While the wedding gown was beautifully designed it was the veil that caught everyone's attention. **This headpiece was a full 75 feet long.** Just to put that in perspective; from where I am standing to the back of the sanctuary is about 48'. Meaning, Priyanka's veil would be long enough to reach the outside and across the front lawn. It was wide enough that most of you could be sitting under it. Now that is a veil! Of course, social media was making fun of the veil claiming it looked like a giant mosquito net, which it does. Personally, I think they were just jealous for not being invited to the wedding.

Veils have been worn for thousands of years by both men and women. Veils were worn for practical reasons of protection from the elements, to identify one's social status or tribe and even for religious

purposes. In fact, in our scripture reading this morning, the Apostle Paul is referring to a time when the great prophet Moses wore a veil.

Apparently, after speaking engagements with the Lord, the face of Moses would shine and it scarred the Israelites. **Moses would wear a veil** to cover up his face, perhaps not to intimidate people or perhaps because so people wouldn't stare at him. Paul is thinking about this Old Testament story when he wrote to the church in Corinth.

Before we go on, I need to say something up front. If you are having a difficult time connecting the dots in our scripture passage, with making a correlation between the Moses veil story and Paul's letter, it is not your fault. One of things that make this passage difficult to understand is how Jewish scholars used the Old Testament. And make no mistake Paul was a Jewish scholar who had studied under the best of rabbis. The way the people of his time used the Old Testament was to take a passage and repurpose it for their particular arguments or points. They called this Midrash and Paul's Jewish audiences would be quite familiar with this technique.

They did not care about plagiarism or taking a passage completely out of context. All that matter was taking something the people were familiar with and using it talk about something they weren't. By the way, Jesus did this too as did the gospel writers. We have to remember all Paul had was the Old Testament. People didn't own books, there was hardly access to what we would call a library and certainly he couldn't look up

anything on line. Paul probably had some knowledge about Jesus' life and possibly some of his sayings or teachings, but very little of it is seen in his letters. The only text he could draw from was the Old Testament.

Paul uses an Old Testament story about the facial veil of Moses to say there is another kind of veil which is covering up people's ability to receive Christ and the good news. This is not a clothe veil but, a spiritual one that is blinding them from seeing. It leads me to wonder if we also, have veiled minds. Are we seeing, hearing and experiencing the living Christ, especially in the way that Jesus wants to be seen, heard and experienced? If Jesus is alive then how alive is our faith and our relationship with him? I suspect many of us live with veiled minds also. What is the problem?

I. THE WORD OF GOD

Well it might shock and surprise us Protestants who believe that Scripture alone is our guiding truth, but Paul writes that one of the problems begins with the word of God, the scriptures. **“But 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. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”**

Now Paul is not saying the scriptures themselves are the real problem, but rather the way we interpret and use them. Their misuse blinds us to God's will. For instance:

A. **When we only pick passages**, we like then we are missing half the gospel. Its great news to know Jesus loves us, but he also calls us to put him first and to a life of obedience. Jesus addressed our attitudes toward finances, family and even our enemy that shock us still. A half gospel is a distorted gospel. It is cheap grace.

B. When we bring our particular political and world views to scripture, which is difficult not to do, we miss the truths of God. How many people want to make Jesus into an environmentalist, a pacifist, a warrior, a feminist, a liberation theologian, a conservative republican, a hippie, a Presbyterian, a revolutionary or any number of other things that justify our thinking and actions? Yes, I think Jesus speaks to all these things on some level. And yet, he was and is more than all of them. Jesus does not fit into our nice neat little categories, as much as we might like him to. To read the Bible this way veils the fullness of it. Worse still, in our history we have used the scriptures to justify slavery, apartheid, abuse of others, war, the oppression of women, the destruction of nature, thereby denying Christ himself.

C. We misuse scripture when we turn them into a **legal system** and use it to oppress others and elevate ourselves. Yes, I believe there are certain standards and values that we are called to live into, but Jesus gave

very few commandments and most of them had a theme of love. If the only words the church preaches are “**do not**” what kind of church are we creating? Jesus emphasized doing and blessing because love is an action verb.

II. PURPOSE – **TO POINT**

One of the things I like to do every now and then is go to a baseball game. Watching the game on TV is okay, but there is something extra special about being at the ballpark. It’s really a combination of the sights, smells, cheers, crowd and being outdoors that adds to the baseball experience.

Now imagine if you will, arriving at a baseball game, grabbing your hotdog and drink, getting to your seat and right next to you is another fan. Think what it would be like if all through the game this guy talked to you non-stop, about each player’s statistics, the history of the team, and how the stadium was built. I imagine that most of us would be rather irritated. Why? That fan knew his stuff, but he caused you to miss the game. The reason you went there was to enjoy the game and feel like you were a part of it, not get a history lesson.

The same could be said about scripture. It is quite possible to have a head full of knowledge about scriptures and miss the game. This is what Paul is complaining about in our passage. These people knew about the word of God, but they missed God and specifically God’s redeeming work in Jesus. Which means they also missed the purpose of the scriptures.

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Torah. The root verb from of Torah means “**to point**”. The purpose of the scriptures is to point us to God. When the Word of God becomes an end in itself we are missing the point. Paul says, “**but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.**” He does not say when one turns to scripture, but rather when one turns to God. In other words, Paul wants us to have a living relationship with the living God, which we know through Jesus.

I believe God often reveals God’s self mainly through scripture, but God also reveals God’s self through our life experiences, nature, relationships, worship, sacraments, preaching, service, fellowship, suffering, in the arts and a million other ways beyond scripture. Part of our calling is to see God at work all around us because God is at work all around us. The beauty of the scriptures is they help us understand that work by providing a framework, a check point or touchstone if you will, to interpret and discern what God is up to. It is important to study and know these words, but if they don’t lead us to Jesus and participation in his mission of earth, we are missing the game and our eyes of veiled.

III. WRESTLE WITH IT

My Son in law was a **wrestler** on the Connellsville High School team back in mid-2000’s. They were a great team and went on to state competitions all three years. In his junior year they were awarded the runner up State trophy and in his Senior year they came back and won it all. The whole team received these huge winner’s rings, including by

daughter who was one of the wrestling managers. Several of the wrestlers received full scholarships to college.

Wrestling is a contact sport. It takes a great deal of stamina, speed and technique to excel in it. Scripture reading ought to be like that. In fact, the name Israel was given to the patriarch Jacob after his all night wrestling match with God. It means to contend with or wrestle with God. As a result of that engagement, Jacob receives a new name, a new understanding and a change in his relationship with God.

Similarly, Paul writes, **“And 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.”**

When Jesus enters our lives we see all things differently, including scripture. When we wrestle with it in the glorious light of Christ the Holy Spirit begins to transform us so that we share in Christ’s glory. We experience the work of God in us and around us.

Someone once told their pastor they were reading through the Bible. The pastor congratulated them for practicing such a discipline. But he went on to challenge the young man by asking, **“As you read the scriptures are they reading you?”**

Twice in this passage Paul speaks about hope and boldness, **“Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.”** Paul was under far more stress than most

of us could imagine. The Corinthian Church was a difficult congregation, and he was coming under a lot of criticism. What sustained him was God's love, God's call upon his life and this ongoing transformative experience of following Jesus. The veil had been lifted from Paul's eyes and the word of God became alive because he met the Light of God and spent the rest of his life in his service.

In our culture we don't use veils much anymore. Most of the time it is at a wedding celebration that we see them, but even that is optional. That doesn't mean our hearts and minds can't be veiled, as Paul reminds us. I challenge us this morning to read the whole of scripture and not just are favorite parts. Wrestle with those books that are difficult understand, especially the prophetic books. Join a bible study group. Most importantly let the Word of God read you that that you might encounter the living Christ. In this you experience transformation and life eternal. Let us prepare our hearts that we might come and meet God who is present at our table this morning. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, March 2, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

II 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.

4Therefore, 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.