

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

With My Own Eyes

Epistle Lesson

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6 (NRSVUE)

¹²Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness, 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, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is 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, underhanded ways; 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. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing clearly the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Bible/Sermon Focus

"...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

In our final week of "May the Force Be With You: The Theology of Star Wars," we are taking a look at one of the most ominous and intriguing characters of the story arc, Anakin Skywalker (a.k.a. Darth Vader). Anakin Skywalker begins as one of the most powerful Jedi padawans and turns to the dark side after losing his mother and his lover to death. He was severely disfigured during a fight in which he fell into a molten pit, and now depends on a respirator for survival. The respirator that keeps him alive is in his mask. Vader's physical mask is a symbol of his metaphorical mask that, in some ways has also kept him alive. In the 1983 novelization of Star Wars Obi Wan tells Luke:

We fought ... your father fell into a molten pit. When your father clawed his way out of that fiery pool, the change had been burned into him forever — he was Darth Vader, without a trace of Anakin Skywalker. Irredeemably dark. Scarred. Kept alive only by machinery and his own black will...

And from that point on Darth Vader is powerful, fierce, malevolent, and feared...and also no longer free. His face remains hidden from all who encounter him, and his life and work is rooted in only fear and darkness.

People wear masks all the time. Sometimes we wear them out of insecurity, pretending to be *better* than we really are, pretending to know more than we really do, pretending to be happier than we really are, pretending to have our lives together. And of course we wear them; the alternative is an honest vulnerability and authenticity. And if we present to the world our honest, authentic self we risk rejection, pain, and even sometimes violence. It's a risk. And this is what makes Christian community, church, so radical.

Christian community, church, is where you can remove the masks. And if the institutional church has not yet been a place for us to do that, than we need to be critical of it. Or better, we need to seek the spaces where our authentic selves can thrive, because, that is *truly* church. Four walls, a pulpit, and a choir is not what makes a church.

As the writer of our epistle says, "Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful, underhanded ways; 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."

Christians seek this authentic community, this being known and knowing others, outside of their bloodline family structures. We know that God will make community where no one thought community was possible. By the grace of God we are given a place where we can take off our masks and see each other, and be seen by each other. In order to become who God wants us to be, we have to be able to be honest about who we are now. We have to feel safe enough to take off our mask so that we can see Jesus with our own eyes, and become our true self, the person God intends us to be. And then, we can be free.

At the end of his life, Vader asks that his mask be removed by his son, and they finally get to see each other eye to eye. Let us not wait until the end of our lives to finally see and be seen.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you worn a mask? Have you ever done so at church? Why?
2. With whom do you share your authentic self?
3. Reflect on your experience of Christian community. Have you always felt like you could be yourself? Do you now?
4. Reflect on this quote from our scripture: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."
5. Reflect on the quote below from James Baldwin.

Prayer

Creator God, who knit us together and knows us intimately. Teach us to love ourselves as you love us. Free us from our fears and insecurities, and to authentic lives filled with community. Help us to love others as you love them. **Amen.**

*"Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without,
and know we cannot live within." - James Baldwin*