

“We Cannot See God, but We Do”

The middle of October has already passed. Do you feel the fall here in Wrightwood this morning? Pine cones litter the side of the narrow alley road, while red, ripe apples dangle from the curved branches of the corner house's fence. It appears that Wrightwood's nature and trees have eagerly awaited autumn, even more so than we have.

The clear skies and cool winds of autumn make people feel cool in the morning and sentimental in the evening. Or is that just me and Euni? Does this type of weather ever make you reminiscent? Around this time, Euni shouts, "Mom, I miss you!" Even though each of us is different, regardless of age or gender, we all have faces we want to see.

However, there's one face that we should all long to see above all. Sometimes we are very hesitant to see His face. Sometimes we meet Him with a mindset of dread, as if visiting a prisoner in prison. He waits for us all the time, but we only take the time to seek Him in very limited opportunities. Who am I talking about? It is the one we call Heavenly Father.

Looking at the scripture of Exodus today, Moses asked God to show His glory. God readily accepted Moses' request, but attached one condition to it: The Lord could not show his face to Moses. What was the reason for this?

So, what does it mean in 33:11 that the Lord used to speak to Moses face-to-face, as one speaks to a friend? Scholars interpret this as saying that Moses had a close and intimate fellowship with God. Then, why did the Bible use the expression “face to face”?

Early in Genesis 32, Jacob confessed, "I have met God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (v. 30), and he named the place Peniel, which means "the face of God." How could he live after seeing God's face? As I previously explained in Jacob's story, these words apply only to God the Father. In the Old Testament, Hagar, Jacob, Gideon, and Manoah saw the pre-incarnate God, the Son Jesus Christ, but lived without dying.

The Lord can show Moses his back, but cannot he show his face? So, what does “the face of the Lord” mean to humans? Clearly, it's not a tool to hide. I interpret this as meaning a boundary for maintaining the absolute authority of God, which, in no case, humans can access. Then, what is the authority of God for?

I interpret that it refers to the last bastion that must be preserved to replace the death penalty for human sin. When that authority is undermined, the means to rescue humanity from eternal punishment is forfeited. That authority was preserved in secret until Jesus was born in this world. We believe that God gave Moses the grace to see the face of the Lord through his eyes of faith when Moses saw his back.

The Lord covered Moses' eyes. Why did he do this? He did not need to hide his face for his own sake. It was a decision made because of us, the weak beings of sin. In other words, God not showing his face is not an act to conceal us but to preserve us. God was more concerned with protecting humans than revealing His authority. Through this act, we realize God's mercy toward us.

#There is a very old chapel in Turin, Italy, where there is a blanket called the Holy Shroud, or holy linen, that has been kept as a treasure. Legend has it that the linen was wrapped around Jesus' remains when he was buried in the tomb.

We do not know very well what chemical reactions took place while the linen was covering the remains. However, people say that they can see the image of Jesus stuck on the linen like a picture. So, people say that they can guess the size and shape of Jesus' face. However, it is impossible for anyone to know the credibility of this claim.

In the gospel of John 14, the disciple Philip asked to see God in the presence of Jesus. Although his expectations were not met, Philip heard Jesus' direct answer, so there was no need for further questions. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’” (v. 9)?

2,000 years later, how can we see God? We can find our way through the words passed down by Jesus' disciples. The Gospel of John 1 says, "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (v. 18).

After that, Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished" on the cross. His death saved us completely from our deaths. If He gave his life for us, He gave us everything. There is nothing more to give to us. Now we do not die even when we see God's face, but we are only happy and thrilled.

Until the second century, Christian artists did not dare to paint the face of Jesus. It was because the dignity of the Almighty Creator was too great, and they were afraid that such a picture would violate the Second Commandment, which says, "Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven, on earth, or in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4a). It was after the 3rd century that artists began painting the face of Jesus.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, paintings of Jesus' face adorned the walls of churches. But all of these were painted by painters, through their imagination of Jesus. How accurate do you think these pictures are? From the paintings, Jesus looks like a pretty handsome man, does he not? There have been many debates about how Jesus actually looked.

However, we believe, at least, that they saw and painted Jesus through hearts and eyes of faith. If any of Jesus' disciples were painters or sculptors, would we have an elaborate and accurate portrait of Jesus today? Through our brushes and sculpting knives of faith, God engraves in us faith, hope, and love.

There is a flower in the background of Euni's smartphone screen; it is a pink rain lily. This flower was in the window of an apartment in Nashville, where my mother-in-law lived until the end of her life. After the funeral, we separated the pots and plants, put them in bags, and boarded the plane.

Ten years have passed since this flower came to California. This flower had difficulty surviving as it migrated through the California deserts we pastored, but has now adapted well to our climate. It still blooms almost once a year. On the day the petals open, Euni says, "Wow, my mom is here today!"

The flower reminds Euni of her memories of love, warmth, pain, and joy, all at once. Perhaps such an opportunity allows her to experience a much greater feeling than seeing her mother's face.

The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: "What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me" (v. 12).

Why is the image of God fainting now? Can we now see only the face of the Lord reflected in the fog? No. Compared to the future, when we and the Lord will see each other face-to-face, our experience now is only faint.

When we receive Jesus as my Savior, the Holy Spirit puts a seal in our souls, confirming that we are children of God. From that moment on, we begin to live lives of faith, seeing and touching the Lord's back and face and participating in all His glory.

Let me now introduce the spiritual changes experienced by those who have seen the face of God.

First, those who have seen the face of God no longer rely on the world but on God. In today's New Testament scripture, the Thessalonians were engaged in acts of faith, labor of love, and perseverance in holding fast the hope they had in Jesus Christ. At the time, they lived in a time of rampant chaos, oppression, and poverty that was incomparable to ours. Their lives were not attached to the world but rather centered around God, who rules the world.

Second, a person who has seen the face of God recognizes the worthlessness of all earthly possessions because of the gift of salvation he has received through the grace of Jesus. The Thessalonians had suffered many tribulations, but they wanted to imitate the disciples of Jesus and their Lord. This was possible because they received the Word with the joy that the Holy Spirit gives.

In Acts 3:6, Jesus' disciples Peter and John cried out to a beggar in the temple. "Silver and gold, I have not, but what I have I give you, that you may walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." For a time, during the church revival, churches had more silver and gold, but today's churches

are running out of silver and gold. But still, more than silver and gold, what the church really needs today is the name of the living Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Psalm 14:2 says: “The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who are wise and seek God.” The eyes of God that watch over us are surely a part of His loving countenance. Therefore, as He has promised, when we earnestly seek God on this Earth, we shall undoubtedly encounter His face.

In conclusion, I extend this advice to my brothers and sisters at WCUMC: Continue to faithfully obey the Lord and experience joy and freedom every day! Amen.

****Reflection and Application for Today’s Sermon:**

1) Paintings of Jesus' face are hung in several places inside the WCUMC building (including the pastor's office). Which of the pictures do you prefer, and why?

2) What remains more precious to you than the value of salvation gained through the cross and resurrection of Jesus? Analyze how it affects your relationship with Jesus, and honestly and boldly ask the Holy Spirit to solve the problem.

3) What changes would you anticipate in your spirituality if you were to witness the glory of God today? Now, you can turn to John 1:14-18 to discover how the Bible addresses your expectations.