

**- Saint John's Pulpit (February 14, Transfiguration Sunday)
- "Transfiguring Grace" 2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled 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 we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light 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 Jesus Christ.

Is Our Gospel Veiled?

A couple of meanings can be found from today. One is Valentine's Day and the other is Transfiguration Sunday by a church calendar. I am very sorry to meet Valentine's Day in the pandemic. Lots of flowers, chocolates, and candies with beautiful gifts wraps and cards... Lots of events for Valentines' Day. Students gladly bring goody bags to their friends and teachers at their schools and churches...

I know that it is Scouting Sunday. I really miss the wonderful breakfast last year with Scouts and their leaders. St. John's United Methodist Men did a wonderful job to serve it. I regret that I didn't eat more slices of bacon last year! I pray that we can do this in the next year with wonderfully grown-up scouts feeling their energy and passion again.

What is Transfiguration Sunday? The transfiguration of Jesus is a story told in the New Testament when Jesus is transfigured and becomes radiant in glory upon a mountain. It can be interpreted that Jesus is transfigured or is revealed his true appearance by unveiling.

What do you think is the major lesson from the pandemic? I believe that it is to know a true appearance from the world. From countries regarded as the most developed ones, we came to know that how they failed to cope with this challenge. From all front-line workers, we came to know that how they are so essential to make our daily life safe and healthy.

Even in churches, one of the interesting discoveries is that big/mega churches do not show an effective resilience, rather most small churches are resilient to recover their services and programs. In that regard, I am thankful to St. John's for their wonderful resilience in their in-person services with success.

In general, there has a belief that churches can grow when they have nice facilities and big parking lots. But the pandemic unveiled this idea saying it is a matter of content, not a matter of facilities. For example, to upload sermons on Youtube needs your smartphone only if you want a minimum budget! Presumably, in many areas, this demystification or unveiling process will be continued even after the pandemic.

In the text today, Apostle Paul asks people to be aware of any trials veiling the Gospel. Simply speaking, he is strongly encouraging people to show a true appearance of the Gospel by Jesus Christ.

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled 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. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NRSV

I have been asked by my friends about St. John's successful in-person service. Do you know this? It is surprising to do in-person services these days, and it is more surprising to see a steady and stable number of attendances every Sunday. For those who are joining on-line services, they used to give good feedbacks and encouraging words.

Certainly, doing in-person service is challenging. For this half-hour service, we need to wear masks, cannot sing hymns, and cannot see a beautiful altar flower. Plus, no coffee-hour after services! Although St. John's choirs and bell choirs serve wonderful music, we agree that this in-person service is somewhat different from what we've done before.

For me, it is very stressful. Under this restrictive circumstance, I need to preach. Traditionally, worship service has been a kind of total art- a wonderful combination of meeting our eyes, ears, heart, and brain! No entertainment! Only dry sermon! This is the reason why I am very grateful for all your supports to make our service viable.

However, in a certain point, I believe that this pandemic makes us experience unveiling our faith seriously and turning to Jesus more. Before the pandemic, we've been entertained by lots of church events, programs, and concerts, and now we are asked to please God by our humble, authentic, and genuine faith.

What We Proclaim

Some of you may know that Virginia Conference Bishop Lewis announced a new restructuring plan for districts early this week. In Virginia Conference, there are sixteen Districts served by the same number of District Superintendents.

Many things around our denomination have given a warning signal to take any action for years. I believe that this pandemic acted as a trigger to bring this decision. So, from this July, sixteen districts will be served by only eight District Superintendents, simply speaking two points charge superintendency!

No surprise at all. It is what we have expected to see. However, a real problem issue is that this is not the end! So, two districts (Alexandria and

Arlington) in Northern Virginia will be served by one District Superintendent. Rev. Jeff Mickle, our District Superintendent is going to retire this June.

This plan surprised lots of clergies this week and maybe their cell phone data was used a lot to talk to each other or one another. Sometimes as a pastor, I am confused to see the denomination wrestle in-between 'survival' and 'revival' seriously. To survive, do we need to do revival? Or to do a revival, do we need to survive?

The next day, it was the beautiful sunshine Tuesday. While I was working on my sermon writing, Anne Moore and Laurie Scheible came over to the church. They had a big box full of valentine's gifts and craft materials for children's ministry. (Unfortunately, no candy for me!)

They plan to make gift bags for Children for a surprise. Beautiful sunshine and bright smiles from these Children's worship team washed away my stress from what the Conference decided. Then, it made me remember these verses from Apostle Paul.

⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light 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 Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 NRSV

What do you think is the role of the church? Paul clearly asserts that it is proclaiming Jesus Christ. Please know this. To proclaim Jesus Christ, we don't have to be John the Baptist! It is from our serving others with love, passion, support, and care just like children worship teachers whom I met this week.

Sharing Jesus and His Light... this is transfiguring Grace which makes all see Jesus from one another. Hope that this transfiguring Grace can make our churches and denomination see a true appearance of the Gospel by Jesus Christ.