

‘Unveiling’

In E.B. White’s masterpiece *Charlotte’s Web*, Charlotte the Spider tries her best to save Wilbur the Pig from becoming plump and delicious hot dogs served at our Mardis Gras celebration today. She decides that if she could spin a message in her web above Wilbur’s sty, people would perhaps take notice of this lovable pig and spare his life. The thing is there is only room for one or two words in the web. What should they be? What one word would communicate all the glory and splendor of a pig? In her last gallant attempt at the county fair just before the coming cold fall, Charlotte spins the word, “radiant.”

Is that a quality of you that we should spin above your sty? Being radiant is more than brightness or simply reflecting light. It’s a vivid illumination, a warm glowing that can best be described as love, confidence or happiness. A radiant face subtly reflects divine glory.

I remember watching Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak at our 1993 St. Louis General Synod. His message was powerful but more so was his face which shone enough joy to melt the hardest of situations. You couldn’t describe it, you only can see it. I can think of a few people worshiping here whose faces reflect the bright peace of Christ wherever they are. You know who I’m talking about. Think about other such people in your life.

The Scriptures tell us that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai after speaking with the Lord his face was radiant. It was so radiant that Aaron and the Israelites were afraid to come near him. In addition Moses figuratively blinded the people in delivering the Law of God and when he was finished, he put a veil over his head supposedly for their protection and it remained until he encountered God again. Some lampshade for a 300-watt halogen lamp!

Moses is not simply a speaker for the word of God, his radiance embodies that word. The people thus do not only hear the word being spoken, they see it standing before them. The sinful people could not face God’s face directly so radiant Moses was their mediator. They could not handle the fullness of God directly. Moses’ own body became divine communication to the community.

There is Moses sitting day in and day out with a blanket over his head. Sometimes the veil does more communicating than the actual Word that is shielded supposedly for protection. Moses wore a veil to shield and protect the people from what they could not understand. But how much protection is too much?

It’s like this. Perhaps you’ve been to a museum or gallery for a grand unveiling of a new sculpture or painting. I’ve only seen it done on TV so all I know is the spectacle. Here is this work of art that the artist wants to keep hidden until a special time when a crowd is assembled to see it. On TV often there are loud gasps and screams at the unveiling but the artist’s intent is to receive cheers and a round of applause.

Concerning the whole realm of art and classical music there too is a shroud or veil that keeps its mystery and grandeur hidden from many folks like you and me. We can hope that somewhere in the stimulus package is funding for stimulating minds through the availability and proper education on the humanities in schools and in the community. We shall not put this light under the basket.

Thank goodness people years ago like Leonard Bernstein brought shows like *A Young Person Guide to the Orchestra* to popular TV. Regarding visual art I was surfing the channels one New Year's Day between the Bowl Games only to discover an English nun with an over bite in full black habit hours on public television. For six straight hours, Sister Wendy Beckett was introducing *The Story of Painting* to people like me. Her explanation about painting from cave drawings to Andy Warhol was so refreshingly clear and easy to appreciate that I was mesmerized and taped every hour. She had lifted the veil on what I could not understand; art was accessible.

The apostle Paul had a veil over his eyes. He did not understand the true word of God. He was hidden from something beautiful - that is the love of Jesus Christ. Remember that his name was Saul and he was the chief persecutor of Christians. No one had shown him the radiance of Christ until Christ himself showed his brilliance to him on the road to Damascus, blinding Paul for three days. In spite of stiff-necked resistance, like from that from Saul and from Moses' Jews, the glory of God cannot be withheld.

Whereas the veil seemed to be a protective device for the Jews, for Paul it is a stumbling block that shields the glory of the Gospel. In II Cor. 3, Paul makes a contrast between the glory shown in Moses and the greater glory that he discovered. Moses received a law carved in stone from God. This written law now was a code of condemnation and death. He knew! He was the killer!

Through the light of Christ, this ancient code had lost its splendor. The new covenant of the Spirit has a greater more permanent splendor and it ministers righteousness to all humanity. All who live under the new covenant enjoy these blessings.

This is not to say that the law of the Old Testament has lost its importance or earlier purpose. Rather, the law lacks permanent validity with the coming of Christ. In its day, the law had sufficient glory to dazzle the eyes of the Israelites, in Christ there is an even brighter light. The bright light of Moses fades steadily into nothingness when God's Son shines behind it. So the ministry of the Spirit which comes through Christian ministers like Paul brings a greater splendor, greater than any splendor from the old covenant. While the prior convictions have great value, they are poor in comparison with the splendor of Christ. This is the revelation of the Transfiguration that is observed today.

Christ has lifted the veil! We have received his radiance. In worship, Christ exposes our souls to his glory and transforms us into his likeness. As we become more conscious of him he becomes more obvious to us. If husbands and wives grow and look more like one another as the years go by, how much more shall we as we live with Christ be changed into his likeness.

Christ has lifted the veil but how often do we fight to put it right back down. Think of all the barriers that have been erected to veil us and others from the radiance of God. What has held you back? What holds you back from ministering to others? Some will say that high church doctrine and cold tradition limits access to Christ. We in the UCC agree. Yet our beloved ways of Sunday worship, our favorite music, our schedules, our precious symbols and terminology may be barriers for new people to see Christ, especially those who have not been raised in a church.

You can add attitudes of Christians that turn faith seekers off. These include prejudice, when we go to the scripture to find support for our own views rather than to find the truth of God, wishful thinking when we find what we want to find and neglect what we do not want to see; disobedience and hypocrisy when we do the talk but don't walk the walk.

So we have a task ahead of us to let Christ's light shine unveiled. As Christians, we can never simply just believe or merely speak the right language; it also means to re-embodiment the word in the world. God's word is a shining radiance, a brilliance, a fieriness. It evokes freshness, vividness, intensity and splendor. The word is light and brightness, not darkness and dullness. The word has to do with warmth and passion, not coldness and apathy. Come to the mountaintop of Jesus Christ.