

WHERE THE SPIRIT IS, THERE IS FREEDOM

Several years ago, Barbara and I took a cruise to Hawaii. As with every cruise, there were excursions available that you could take. One of the excursions we took was to go out the famous road to Hana, which is on the island of Maui. I don't know if you've ever been out that road, but it really is an exercise in prayer. It's one of the most dangerous roads in the country. In some places it curves, and you cannot see around the blind turns. Also, there are a number of places where there are bridges that are only wide enough for one car, and it's a two-way road, so you have to try to figure out if the other guy is come or not. You don't want to be sitting in the front seat while traveling that road. I'm speaking from experience about that.

When we got to the end of the road to Hana, we toured a lava tube. If you don't know what that is, that's a cave created by hot lava cutting a channel beneath a surface of lava that has already cooled. If you've ever seen one, you know how magnificent it is. It's really a testament to the power of the Earth to transform itself.

In fact, the Hawaiian islands are themselves a testament to that power. The Hawaiian islands are a chain of hundreds of islands. There are one or two hot spots in the Earth's crust that create volcanoes. As the Earth's crust moves over those spots, volcanoes are formed and they create islands. Currently that hot spot is fueling the active volcanoes on the Big Island.

As you move north and west, you find the other islands of the Hawaiian chain. These were created in the same process, but the Earth's crust continues to move, and they are no longer over that hot spot. This caused the volcanoes to go dormant, and erosion began. The other large islands of the Hawaiian chain, such as Maui and Oahu and the others, are what's left when the volcano goes dormant and begins to erode.

As you move farther north and west you find atolls and reefs. An atoll occurs when sea life creates a reef around the volcano and then the volcano erodes, leaving a ring-shaped island surrounding a central lagoon. Then eventually the reef sinks beneath the waves. There are lots of little atolls and reefs at the end of the Hawaiian chain.

I thought about this today, because it's one of the most awe-inspiring transformations in nature. Transformation is at the heart of today's passage. In this story we see Jesus transformed.

This Sunday is named "Transfiguration of the Lord" Sunday. This story of the Transfiguration itself is not in the story I just read you. It's one of the strangest stories in the New Testament, and I encourage you to read it. You can find it in Luke 9:28-36 and also in Matthew 17:1-13. In this story, Jesus journeys to the

top of a mountain alongside Peter, James, and John, and he is transfigured before them. He glows and his glory shines like the sun.

This is the day that we celebrate that event- the transfiguration. Throughout the world today people are going to talk about the transformation of Jesus. Most of the commentaries will be pointing to the supernatural essence of Jesus. However, I believe that II Corinthians passage where Paul refers to the event is after something different.

In this passage Paul talks about the way that an ordinary mortal, like Moses, or perhaps like you and me, can be transformed by the power of God. He refers to the story in Exodus 34:29-35. In that story, Moses came down from Sinai. As he came down his face shined like the Sun, because he had been speaking with God. So, Moses called the elders of Israel to him and spoke to them, giving them the commandments. Then after giving them the commandments, he donned a veil. He only took it off when speaking to God, and when he had finished. he would put it back on.

What Paul says is that Moses donned the veil to hide the glory of God within. In the same way, when the word of God is read, there is a veil that lies over the heart. The Jesus event, however, changes that dynamic. The spirit of the Lord frees us. It lifts the veil from us.

Actually, it does more than that. The great thing about this story is that the glory of God is no longer restricted to Jesus, or even to titanic figures like Moses. Instead through the power and grace of Jesus Christ, God is at work transforming all of us. The glory of God shines forth through us every time we speak the word of God. The glory of God shines forth through us because of Jesus Christ. Every time we study the word of God, the glory shines through us because of Jesus Christ. With every good work that we do, the glory of God shines through us, because of Jesus Christ.

It's as if the process I described a little while ago, regarding the way the Hawaiian Islands were formed, was happening in reverse. Instead of the flame going out and erosion setting in, we're built up day-by-day until we become something magnificent- something holy. It's not happening by our own power, but by the spirit of Jesus Christ working through us as we focus our attention on the Spirit of the Living God. It's that power of God working through us that causes us to shine! The glory of God is no longer veiled. The glory of God is no longer hidden- it shines forth from us every time the Spirit works through us. When the spirit works through us, we are free.

We don't have to hide God's glory. It's at work in us transforming us-remaking us into the pure image that God made us to be. In Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God has been freed in us to shine forth and illumine a weary world.

So, the question is, why do we hide it? Why do we just internalize the word of God? Why do we let it sink in and do nothing with it? There is no reason that we should have to hide it from anyone or anything. Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom also. You're free to let the glory of God shine forth.

So, the question I ask you to consider is, what's holding you back? What's keeping you from letting that happen? Is it fear? Is it anxiety? Is it interest in other things? What is it? What's holding you back? What's keeping you from letting that freedom out.

You have nothing to fear. Take off the veil. Let the word of God shine forth in you, because where the spirit of God is, there is freedom also. Go out and be the people that God called you to be. Spread the word! Do the works of God! You can do it! You can be whatever God is calling you to be in God's power because where the spirit is, there is freedom also.