

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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John Crosby
Moses' Humility | Exodus 34**

What a great beginning to the Thanksgiving week—the humility to receive and give thanks. This autumn we have had the opportunity to hear about a life lived long ago—Moses, eight or nine weeks' worth—and for me it's been a great series. I have enjoyed you asking good questions. I feel like I have learned myself in fresh ways and in new ways that impact my faith. As hard as it is to believe, at two o'clock in the morning on Tuesday I awaken in New Delhi and can't get back to sleep, so I literally rolled over, turned on my iPad, and watched Petey's sermon. I thought he did such a phenomenal job. This idea of praying in a way that says *God, if You won't go with me, I'm not going. God, if You won't go with me, I'm afraid to go anywhere.* And the idea that we would learn to turn to God and ask, *God, are You with me?* comes to us through the life of Moses. I hope you learn something today. I hope you connect something today, but my prayer all through this week has been that today you would have more courage and that you would have enough courage to actually do something. One of the things I learned through our study of Moses is that Moses doesn't go up to the mountain top one time, he doesn't even go up twice; Moses and the company go up to the mountains to hear from God seven different times in this story, and they are different when they return. Let's hear about one of those encounters in Exodus chapter 34:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, a covenant with you and Israel." Moses was with the Lord forty days and forty nights without bread or water, And he wrote on tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the law in his hands, he wasn't aware that his face was radiant from speaking with the Lord. When Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses, his face was still radiant, and they were afraid and ran away. But Moses called out, and all the leaders of the community came back, and he spoke to them. Then all the Israelites came near, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. When he came out, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. [Exodus 34:27-35]

Moses put on a veil because what was happening with him was changing him, turning him into something incredibly special. The veil was a representation of those incredibly special things. Now in our day we don't put on veils, we put on masks and they are for special people. When we think of masked people who are special, we think of the Lone

Ranger, or Batman, or Captain America, or Ironman. They all wear masks. The face is covered; there is a hero inside. Moses put on the veil so that he would not be the story.

That's the first half of the story—Moses puts on a veil because the glow of his face scared people, but the reason this is in the Scriptures is not because he put on the veil, but that he kept the veil on—even after the glow faded, he kept the veil on. Now it says that Moses was the most humble person that walked the face of the earth, but he was still more special when the veil was on than when the veil was off.

Dallas Willard says that at the root of all of the pain of humanity is the besetting failure of humankind for image management. We spend our lives managing our image, and we sin in our need to look good—to manage our image. To hide what is really happening inside we put on a veil or a mask. I was walking out with a lady yesterday who said, “I’m Teresa of a thousand veils.” We all wear masks. From the Garden of Eden on, we hide. Remember how the Bible said the Lord created Adam and Eve and they were naked and they were not ashamed? Then they chose not to follow God and they saw that they were naked and they ran away. Quivering in the bushes, wearing leaves caked on with mud...hiding. They were wearing masks so that God wouldn’t see them. Anybody seen the movie Marshall yet? You really ought to see it. It’s about Thurgood Marshall—great movie. Langston Hughes, the poet, is in it. Another of the great African American poets was Paul Laurence Dunbar...wonderful. And his most famous poem is this theme. His poem is called “We Wear the Mask.”

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile...
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise...
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Something different is happening underneath. Dunbar wrote that because of the inability of others to understand what it was like to be African American in America. But it's not just about being black, it's about being human. We wear the mask—or the veil. Some of you, your mask is humor. It's hard to get to know who you really are because you deflect everything with a joke or something funny. And for some of you, the veil is intelligence. It's not getting to know you; it's getting to know what you know. You always have to have more information to win the argument. Some of you have a great veil—it's the veil of service. You are always so busy doing things for other people that you have no time to let people do things for you, or to get to know you. For others of you, the veil is sarcasm. If people were to try to get to know you, sarcasm would push them away. For some of us, I believe that the veil is spirituality. You always have a God talk, “in the Lord” good answer for everything. But what is happening underneath? What's your veil? If you were to think for just a second, what's your veil? It's a lifelong journey, this wearing a mask that Moses shows us.

The first game we ever learn is “Peek-A-Boo. I see you!” We hide and then we show and then we hide again. Now, that changes and frankly for about 18 months to two years as children are toddlers they don’t wear the veil. They turn from “Peek-A-Boo. I see you” to “Watch me! Wasn’t that great? Watch me again! Wasn’t that great?” They want you to see everything. But then usually by the time they get to school, the veil comes on. It isn’t “Peek-A-Boo” anymore, and it’s not “Watch me”, it’s “Do you like me?” I will become what you need to see so that you will like me. And we manage our image so much that even when we get to know each other, we don’t drop the veil very often.

Laura was in a small group for years with some women. They talked about their kids and their husbands and all of life, and then one day a woman came to the group and said, “I suppose I should tell you, he moved out last week and my marriage is over.” And everyone was like, “Wait...what? You never talked about...what?” She said, “Well, you are all so together. You just have it together and I felt like I just couldn’t take the chance.” Every human being born on planet earth hides and puts a veil over our scars or our wounds or our fears. Since the fall, our tendency is to hide as if our life depended on it. Listen to that phrase again: our tendency is to hide as if our life depended on it. The truth is, our life depends on being found, not hidden. Our life depends on getting found because there is no healing in hiding. So what’s the answer? Well, Oscar Wilde says to just be yourself...everybody else is already taken. Sounds good—that’s why it’s on a bumper sticker. I believe authenticity—taking the veil down—is a terrifying thing. And I think one of the hardest places for us to take down the veil is in church. Whether that’s in youth group or the choir or with the Edynamoes, we wear the mask; we keep up the veil. Can I just tell you this? That repels people. That keeps people away, either because they figure *Oh, I could never fit in there, those people are together and I’m not* or because they say *those people think they are better than we are; they’re hypocrites.*

People drive by this church by the thousands and the tens of thousands or the hundreds of thousands and they look at us and they look at our building and our parking lot and they say *how could I ever fit in there?* We have a case of that in the Bible; the church became toxic. In the gospel of Matthew Jesus says,

²⁷ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. [Matthew 23:27]

It pushes people away, but we’re afraid to tell how things are going.

More than twenty years ago we hired a new pastor. He was great; he worked with our Missions group. His family was wonderful, they had this lovely house, and everybody loved them...got to know them. He did great work with our missions, and about five years in we discovered he had stolen about \$150,000 of, I was going to say church money, but it was really money that was going to the poor. In private once I asked him how this happened, and he said, “Well, I would take \$100 but then I would put it right back. Then I’d take \$1,000 and put \$800 back. I’d take \$2,000 and put \$1,000 back. I got further and further behind.” I said, “I know how you did it, but I’m wondering why?”

He told me, “Well, I so much loved making my family happy. My wife’s first husband was a doctor and we have this incredible house. I couldn’t tell her we had to sell the house. She drives this Saab convertible...I didn’t want to tell her we couldn’t afford that car. And I certainly couldn’t say to you John that I wasn’t able to handle the money right. How do you live and work here, with your kids in this community, if you aren’t like everybody else?” The veil almost literally killed him. The irony is that people are not drawn to those who have it all together. People are not drawn to those who wear the veil. We are drawn to those people who are refreshingly real. An example of that: Some of you are old enough to remember Pope John XXIII, the peasant who becomes Pope--Vatican II and all that stuff...He is doing a Papal audience in Rome surrounded by all his Cardinals, and a woman comes in. She is a large chested woman and she is wearing a low cut dress. The Pope looks around and he says, “You know, it’s so interesting to be a Pope. Before, when a woman like that entered the room, we all looked at her, and now that I’m Pope, you all look at me.” They were looking at him to see if he is pretending not to look, and they were pretending not to look at her because they were wearing a veil. I believe that he was doing a favor by telling the truth. I think disclosure—taking the veil down—disclosure breeds disclosure. Taking the mask down helps other people.

Jesus did not wear a veil. When He was happy, He laughed. When He was sad, He wept. When He was angry, He yelled or threw things. When He was tired, He slept. When He was afraid, He told people He was afraid. And His followers never had to guess who He really was. The reason we know that is because His disciples, His followers, don’t wear the veil. The reason people believe the story of the gospel is because the disciples are klutzes. They act like idiots; they act just like you and me. They’re not trying to pretend, and as they go out and try to spread the message of Jesus, they say *Don’t get better. You’re not going to get better. Get closer to Jesus.* And they started to preach the lesson of Moses and the veil. They started to preach about what it is like to wear a veil.

Paul talks to a church in Corinth and Paul says this:

¹² Since we have hope that this new glory within will never go away, we preach with great boldness. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not see the glory fade away. [2 Corinthians 3:12-13]

We don’t wear the veil. You’re not going to see the holy glow.

Actually, that section includes these verses:

¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled faces reflect the Lord’s glory, and are being transformed into his likeness... [2 Corinthians 3:16-18]

My question for you is: does anybody have the courage this week to take the veil off and turn to the Lord?

What does it take to remove the veil? It seems to me that people who take off the veil have found some hope in Christ. Since we have hope in Christ, we want freedom instead of having to act. When people take off the veil it's because they have the desire to stop hiding. When we turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. I don't have to pretend to be who I'm not because Jesus loves who I am. What does it take to remove the veil? Can I just share with you? I think it takes a community of people with buck-naked faces. It takes relationships that can stand the weight of truth where I can actually be who I am.

I'm paid to do this stuff...I'm paid to be good, and it's not going well. I'm trying, and one of the ways that a pastor tries is to be nice to people, even people that he thinks are jerks. He's nice to everybody. Now, I have had a friend for decades...he's very involved with the life of the church, and sometimes we do great and sometimes we do bad, but often I feel like I never measure up to this person; I never do it right and I feel that he is critical. And so this person, just a little while ago, asks the office for some information about things that the church is doing, and I hear about it. So, with my pastoral bravery, I write an email. I'm in India and I write this email telling him I had heard he wanted to know stuff, and I asked him if anything was going on. And I am really, on the outside, thinking this will be fine, but on the inside I'm thinking *Oh my God, oh my God...what's he heard?* And I wait and then the response came and he said, "Well, you know, I just have not always been sure about my motives, but I heard at Vision Night that I need to be one of the stakeholders here, and so I asked for the information so that I could do better here. So that I could be a stakeholder. This church matters to me." And as I read that, my first reaction was Whew! And my second reaction was shame. My second reaction was embarrassment. And a couple of nights later I wrote this person and I said, "I just need to confess to you that I'm not sure that I have thought well of you. I have been worried about what you would think or say about me, and I need to confess that to you." And so because he took down the veil, I was able to try at least, and I think God will be glorified with that.

You know, the most sacred twenty minutes of this church happens on Sunday mornings at about 12:30PM right here. We have a little service called Mosaic and it's for our mentally challenged kids. They come in here and they take out little musical instruments, and they sing songs and they are terrible. They jump up and down and they go all different ways, and it is being in the presence of God. And when I was in India this last week, one of the things that World Vision is doing is to draw together the mentally handicapped because in a poor society, no one will take care of them. They never get out of the house, and in these day care centers and schools they bring the kids together and they teach them songs. I'm in New Delhi and the Indian kids are jumping up and down and laughing and singing in Indian "Jesus Loves Me", and I started to cry. The director of World Vision Australia is next to me and he says, "Look at

her,” and he is pointing to the director. He said, “She knows everybody’s name. She loves them. She gives them an instrument and they stand up front.” And he said to me, “Doesn’t her face look like the face of Jesus?”

But we all, with unveiled faces, reflect the likeness of our God when we take down the veil, when we trust in Jesus, when we serve one another.

Lord Jesus, this week I pray that You would make our Thanksgivings a time of giving thanks for Your goodness. I pray that You would help me and my sisters and brothers here to see where we have been faking it...where, like Moses, we keep the veil on. I pray, Lord Jesus, that You would take down the veil and say that You love us, and You want us to learn to love one another like that. To the glory of God that never fades, be praise. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.