

Genesis 32:22-30

Eleven days from now, figures with strange faces may come to your door asking for candy. You may not recognize them because their identity will be hidden beneath their mask. Yet, you will comply with their request. If a masked figure were to approach your house any other time of the year, you would become alarmed. But on Halloween, homeowners may have concerns only if no one comes to receive the blessing of candy.

It was not Halloween the night a strange figure came to the tent of Jacob. He did not come with his hand out. He came and began to wrestle. Hour after hour, all night long until the break of day, this strange visitor wrestled with Jacob. It was only after the light began to dawn that he spoke. *“Let me go,”* he said. But Jacob refused, *“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”* The visitor complied. He blessed Jacob and then departed. And when he was gone, Jacob said, *“I have seen God face to face.”*

That night God was not wearing a Halloween mask, but He did mask Himself to cover His glory. Which face did Jacob see in the dawn’s early light? The same face that Mary saw when she cradled her baby in her arms. The same face that Lazarus beheld when he came out of his tomb. The man who wrestled with Jacob was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God, who appeared in the flesh from time to time throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus is the face of God. No one can look at God and live. The last time men looked at God with His face uncovered was before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden. But when they ate the forbidden fruit, and God came looking for them, we’re told that they *“hid themselves from the face of the Lord God.”* God’s face, to the sinner, is more terrifying than the most hideous, vile creature man can imagine. And so God must cover Himself when He comes to poor sinners. Even in the Garden He covered His face with the promise of the coming Savior. After sin, the only face of God that man can endure is the face of Christ.

And so God became man we confess in our Creed. He covered Himself with flesh. On the Mount of Transfiguration, for a brief moment, the glory of God’s majesty and holiness shined through the flesh of Jesus, and His disciples turned away. But apart from that brief time, God’s glory remained hidden within Jesus’ flesh.

The face of God is like the sun shining in all of its brightness. We cannot look upon the sun, and yet we depend upon it for life itself. Were the sun not ever to turn its face toward us, we would die. And so with God. Were He to turn His face away from us, we would perish. And so we cherish the words spoken in the benediction each Sunday: *“The Lord...make His face to shine upon you...”* But where do we see the face of God? Where does God’s face shine upon us?

Jesus is the face of God. A few minutes ago we sang the hymn, *“Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face.”* Just as He came to the tent of Jacob, so God comes to this dwelling place. Jesus is with you always, as He has promised. He is present where two or three are gathered in His name. But the tent of Jacob, where you see God face to face, is the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is the face of God. But even Jesus is covered, masked we could say, with the elements of bread and wine. The glory of God is here, but He is hidden within these earthly things for us to eat and drink.

When God came to the tent of Jacob, He wrestled with him until daybreak. God is not here to wrestle with you. He is here to bless you. He sees how you wrestle with sin day after day. He sees how sin so often gets ahold of you and pins you down. God knows that we are no match for the power of sin.

Anger, lust, and greed, despair, apathy, and pride--sin gets the better of us on a regular basis. Even we who are baptized into Christ, who are no longer under sin's power, but now live under grace--even we, weak as we are, do not turn to prayer and the Word of God as we should, and sin jumps all over us and puts us in a chokehold.

And yet God is merciful. He laid aside His royal garments and took up the clothing of a servant, and He walked the path of suffering and death, even death on a cross. Jesus wrestled with your sin, and He allowed Himself to be dragged to His crucifixion on a hill outside Jerusalem. Just as He let Jacob prevail over Him that one night in his tent, so Jesus let the power of sin and darkness prevail as He bowed His head and died. But three days later, in the dawn's early light, the glory of the Son of God burst forth from the tomb as Jesus rose from death.

This is not just a nice story children hear in Sunday School. This is the power of God over sin in your life. This is your victory and hope, and nothing else is. The face of God shines upon you because Jesus died and rose again for you. In your baptism, God turned His face to shine upon you. In the Word of Christ that comes to you here in His house of mercy, God shines His face upon you to bless you and keep you. And here in the Supper of the Lord, you see God face to face. And His face is full of love, full of grace, full of forgiveness for you. He does not look upon your sin. Your sin is forgiven. Jesus, who is the face of God, looks upon you as a father looks upon his newborn child.

And so come. You who have wrestled with sin last week, come and see your God face to face. You who have become angry, and lusted, and have been full of greed, come and see your God face to face. You who have despaired, who have mourned with sorrow, come and see your God face to face. Jesus is the face of God. And He is here to shine upon you with His gifts--life, salvation, peace, joy, victory, hope...and forgiveness for all of your sins. Amen.