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In August of 2017, I stood in my front yard during the day, looking up into the sky, and on April 8, 2024, I'll be doing it again. I imagine lots of other people will join me in this event, for that's the day of the next solar eclipse visible here in Indiana. I still have my special filter glasses from the last eclipse, along with my solar filter for my telescope. Viewing the eclipse without the glasses or filter could cause me to go blind, for the power of the sun would overwhelm my eyes with its brightness.

I wonder if that's how Moses perceived the brightness of God, for when he went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from God, the story in Exodus tells us that Moses stood in a gap in a large rock, which cast a shadow on Moses as God came into his presence. The story explains that the event was like God placing a hand over Moses' face to shield him from the brightness of God's presence.<sup>1</sup>

When he came down from the mountain, Moses' face was so brilliant from God's light that the people were quite startled, so he wore a veil over his face to hide the brightness.<sup>2</sup> Just imagine what it would be

like if we reflected God's brilliance after our encounters with God. Rather than hiding our light under a basket, to use Jesus' metaphor, we would let it shine.

That might be as confusing as when Moses came down from the mountain and had to hide his face, for have you ever known folks who just don't want to see what you have to offer as you talk about the light of God? Maybe you try to talk about God, and they would rather change the subject to the latest movie or sporting event. Or maybe you try to explain why you attend church, but they would rather talk about their latest vacation. Or maybe they ask you challenging theological questions that you can't answer. They may even reply, "I just don't get the church thing. I tried it, and it just doesn't make sense to me." Trying to have a conversation about our experience with Jesus can be difficult.

It appears the apostle Paul had a similar problem. When he wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, he used the imagery of Moses covering his face with a veil, telling a variation on the story from Exodus. It appears that some people were challenging Paul's leadership in the church, so he reminded them of the time Moses

covered his face to hide the brilliant reflection of God's light. But in retelling the story, Paul wondered if some listeners had *their* eyes covered with a veil.

As good church folks read this letter thousands of years ago, I imagine them wondering, "Who's he talking about? Who are the ones who can't see? Surely, he doesn't mean me! I don't have a veil over *my* face." Paul was using the story to catch them by surprise, to suggest that some of them didn't see what God was doing.

Sometimes we may not notice the veil over our own faces—a covering that prevents us from seeing what God is doing. Our vision becomes so narrowly fixed that we miss what's happening in the world, as one teenage girl discovered as she conducted an experiment. She wrote about her experience on Facebook about wearing a veil-like covering called a hijab that Muslim women may wear:

My name is Ela. I am seventeen years old. I am not Muslim, but my friend told me about her friend being discriminated against for wearing a hijab. So I decided to see the discrimination firsthand to get a better understanding of what Muslim women go through.

My friend and I pinned scarves around our heads, and then we went to the mall. Normally, vendors try to get us to buy things and ask us to sample a snack. Clerks usually ask us if we need help, tell us about sales, and smile at us. Not today. People, including vendors, clerks, and other shoppers, wouldn't look at us. They didn't talk to us. They acted like we didn't exist. They didn't want to be caught staring at us, so they didn't look at all.

And then, in one store, a girl (who looked about four years old) asked her mom if my friend and I were terrorists. She wasn't trying to be mean or anything. I don't even think she could have grasped the idea of prejudice. However, her mother's response is one I can never forgive or forget. The mother hushed her child, glared at me, and then took her daughter by the hand and led her out of the store.

All that because I put a scarf on my head. Just like that, a mother taught her little girl that being Muslim was evil. It didn't matter that I was a nice person. All that mattered was that I looked different. That little girl may grow up and teach her children the same thing.

This experiment gave me a huge wake-up call. It lasted for only a few hours, so I can't even begin to imagine how much prejudice Muslim girls go through every day. It reminded me of something that many people know but rarely remember: the women in hijabs are people, just like all those women out there who aren't Muslim.<sup>3</sup>

Who's wearing the veil? At first glance, it seems to be a story about a teenage girl wearing a veil at the mall, but I think it actually tells a story about a mother of a little girl wearing a veil over *her* eyes, preventing her from seeing that all women, regardless of their faith, are children of God.

Yes, we could have theological arguments over how God works in the world or the idea of salvation. We could debate how Christians have mistreated Muslims, or we could argue about what has inspired some extremists to hijack religion for their own political or personal agendas. But those conversations only create thicker veils, preventing us from seeing one another as children of God.

You could probably pick any other issue and hide behind a veil, especially today during the debate on COVID. Many of us have longed to take off our masks, but some remain unconvinced that distancing or immunizations are helpful. Some hide behind political masks that prevent them from seeing the reality of how we could reduce the impact of this illness.

Maybe you know of other veils that you have hidden behind. Maybe the veil of always having to be right. Or the veil of getting more stuff to keep up with everyone else. Or the veil of arguing to protect yourself from listening to someone else.

Paul offered his readers an encouraging word, for he suggested that by turning to God, their veil would be removed, giving them freedom. In doing so, their lives would be transformed and they would reflect the light of God in a similar way that a mirror reflects light.

That's also a good word for us today—by turning our face to God and removing our veil, not only can God see us more clearly, but we can see the brilliance of God as well. No need for solar filters to obscure the brightness of God. By recognizing the presence of God, you have the freedom to be who God created you to be—a child of God, loved, accepted, and cherished--one who reflects the light of God into the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 33:20-23.

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 34:29-35.

<sup>3</sup> Posted on *Facebook*, December 1, 2012.