
The Veil of Differences

[Click here for the podcast](#)

The Rev. Canon Carolynne Williams
The Cathedral of St. Philip
Atlanta, Georgia
February 14, 2010
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-43a

Watching the opening ceremony of the winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Colombia along with 63 other million people, took me to a time in my mind's eye on several levels, to my past.

Beginning in October or early November of each year, the airlines has a schedule change throughout its system. The main reason for the schedule change was to incorporate the seasonal flights to different parts of the country and the world to accommodate the travelers.

Amongst the hundreds of changes, there were always a select few that were sought after by the flight crews. One of the changes was to increase or begin, because of the season change, the flights to ski country in order to accommodate the number of travelers. There was always Jackson Hole, out of Atlanta or Park City out of Salt Lake City or Vail, but a lesser known destination, at the time, but prized resort was in Crested Butte, MT.

Those Flight attendants and pilots who had an interest in that part of the country for various reasons always bid on those flights because it brought about a change of scenery and the people traveling were always in a good mood.

Outbound from the south, the vacationers were always filled with anticipation and the joy in the air of conquering those personally set goals in skiing and being with family and experiencing nature at its best, was the focus.

Kalispell was another one of those seasonal destinations for those who wanted to spend time in and around Glacier National Park. Those folk were experiencing the excitement, wonder and light captivating moments of seeing the result of the seasonal change close up without all of the crowds that is an expected part of the picture in the more popular places.

Being a southerner, one of my favorite parts of this journey every week, as a member of the crew, was to look out of the window like a child, and see the light and brightness that lifted its embracing arms toward the heavens. The brightness of the reflection from the snow was always so vivid and the air was clear.

The veil of the bright snow had covered all that was in its path and for those moments in time one could see the light and reflection of all that was intended for good. The snow would sparkle as a result of the sun's reflection and just for a moment as one would stand in the midst of this embrace of nature there was always stillness and peace that permeated the air.

Another level that I reflected upon during my watching of the opening ceremony is how hard we seem to work at focusing

on our differences.

The different cultures and peoples represented folks from all corners of the world. Their presence caused me to smile at the diversity and its implications. Some lived and others dreamed about.

During this opening ceremony, as the representatives of the 82 nations came over the hill and into the eyes view of the main camera in alphabetical order, The Nations beginning with the letter I were now in front of the camera in procession. They became my focus, not because of the differences in their dress, but more because of the moderator's comments in regard to these three countries that began with the letter "I".

Watching them and thinking about differences in people as I continued to watch the parade of nations as they entered the arena, caused me to dream a bit. The nucleus of all nations participating as they gathered in the center of the arena formed a beautiful tapestry of humanity.

The delegation from Ireland had the distinction of separating the delegation from Iran from the delegation from Israel. In other words Ireland was between Iran and Israel.

The moderator went on to comment that at the last winter Olympics in Torino, four years ago , Iran refused to participate in the event because of the presence of the delegation from Israel. With that being said, I considered their presence in this winter Olympics to be a step forward. Even in the midst of their vast differences, they have moved a little closer together, that is at least agreeing to participate in the same event, even though they will not perhaps share a meal together, but yet agree because of common interest to participate in the same common sphere that they share.

There has been a reconciliation of some sort on one level in the midst of their long history of differences.

The distinction of the national flags, the dress chosen and the native languages spoken will all be funneled through a common strand which is connected through a common interest.

The differences that are visible to the naked eye and ear: their manner of dress, their language in some instances, skin color in a few places, the region from which they hail and their political stances may be noticeable to those who are looking for that line of demarcation.

For those who live by, for and thrive because of these lines of difference who are only looking at the surface and not at what brings them together in the midst of the competition, I would offer are missing the most obvious when the veil of blindness is lifted.

What is missing is the humanness that permeates that veil of differences. The human connection that unites one to another beyond the veil.

The veil is not used here as a veil across the eyes. It is used symbolically as a veil around the mind of each of us. This blindness blocks the eyes from seeing what is to be seen especially for those who believe in the humanity of one to another.

The unforeseen tragedy that struck within this gathered community in the immediate death of one of the best athletes in the world, ranked number 44, brought them and us, the watching world, all to a place which spanned all lines of differences. The tragic death of Nodar Kumaritashvili from the Republic of Georgia and the subsequent interview with his father changed our focus. It brought us to a place that none of us wanted to look at. It changed our focus and forced us to look face to face at the sacredness of humanness as the world prayed for the presence of God in the midst of unbearable circumstances.

The closer community of lugers participating in these world competitions, 44 men, according to the commentator has said the following: they, the lugers, are a close community in the midst of their competitive spirit and because of the death of their colleague and friend, they have bonded even more so, so that they can focus on what they have gone to Vancouver to do. This tragedy has removed the veil of differences in the midst of their competitive spirits.

The mark of a professional athlete, according to the experts, is to be able to focus in the midst of whatever circumstances around them.

Even in the midst of this tragic turn of events, there remains an air of anticipated celebration and good times and rightfully so, never forgetting, according to the lugers report, as they seek to bring glory to their country, they are reminded of the possibilities in the midst of the competition.

At the beginning of the games as the eleven person contingent from Georgia came into the arena, 60,000 strong stood in unison. Whatever our focus, the event that gains our attention also reminds us of the circumstances that changes the outlook of all involved and connected participants, either by choice, by profession, by vocation or as an observer, one in their humanness is touched. The focus, the place where the energy is concentrated begins in the mind and often connects to the heart.

It is a challenge to separate one from the other as often as we may try in the midst of our humanness and perceived differences.

Paul, in his humanness, even though he was a prophet, had another purpose in mind when it came to the people at Corinth. His focus, if you will was to seemingly reinterpret the intent of the people of Israel as they followed Moses.

He saw the story of Moses covering his shining face with a veil in the Old Testament representing the covenant between the people of Israel and the people of the New Testament no longer being under the law. Paul preached to the people of Corinth saying that they had a place of freedom.

The difference in the midst of the humanness of the people of the old covenant and those of the new covenant is that the freedom they experienced had a different focus. The people of the New Testament were focused on their freedom being found in the chosen one.

Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35) NRSV

The freedom for the people at Corinth enabled them to change their focus. The point of their focus came not from themselves, but from the common thread in the midst of their humanness. The spirit of Christ within them enabled them to change their focus. Even in the midst of their differences.

This new focus was given to them as they were in communion with one another. It began with their seeing beyond their differences and focusing on their humanness as they saw it in one another.

The newness of freedom given to them through the spirit was their focus. The spirit within us is what we have in common. All of us who were born into this world have a spirit.

These babies that are here today to be baptized will be sealed and marked as Christ's own forever. They will be baptized by the waters that have been blessed and filled with the Holy Spirit and sealed with the Chrism that has been blessed and marked as Christ's own forever. Will they have their differences? Yes. Will they see things differently as they grow into maturity? Perhaps. Will they have different views about the same subjects? Probably. But the commonality that they will share is being baptized into the body of Christ and being marked as every Christian is as belonging to Christ forever. Nothing can separate them from the love of God.

These little ones will never be separated from the love of Christ. Not hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword. Nothing will separate these precious babies from the love of God because they will learn about the love of God for them beginning with their baptism.

Because of the fruit of the spirit, they will experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Their focus will become what they are taught especially about the love of God for them.

Well, the vacationers are still travelling to parts of this country to ski and there will be local competitions. The common

thread that binds the competitive spirit is always usually for good. The families, friends and strangers who gather in these places of beauty to ski and enjoy the wonders of the competitive spirit are abounding and flourishing.

There will be differences, but there will always be the common thread if it is kept in mind and that is the love that is for all who accept it through the humanness in each of us, in the midst of differences which begins in the mind and connects to the heart. Not in a sense of being naive, but in a sense of humanness and an inquiring mind.

Whatever, our focus, the event that gains our attention also reminds us of the circumstance that changes the outlook of all involved and connected participants, either by choice, by profession, by vocation or as an observer, one in their humanness is touched. The focus, the place where the energy is concentrated begins in the mind and often connects to the heart. It is a challenge to separate one from the other.

Paul says that if we listen, we will hear the words that tell us to stay the course, persevere and never give up. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Ask Hannah Kearney, from Vermont, who four years ago lost at Torina or Susan Batrke from Montana.

They are bringing home the gold and bronze respectively in women's skiing.

They will tell you, I imagine that differences are good, but the team's spirit makes the difference. That is, God is always with us in the midst of it all. Amen

Comments? Contact The Rev. Carolynne Williams: cwilliams@stphilipscathedral.org