Ok, so where does Paul see Christ visible in our lesson for today? What makes Jesus visible to our eyes? Two things he says directly, and that will be the basis of my remarks for today. The first is that we carry in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible. So there is this death at work in us Paul says, and to see this is to see, to see this happening, to see this reality, is to see the reality of Jesus. Make sense? Now I know it might not make sense to you, because that’s not our natural inclination as to where we might see God. But there it is. If you want to see the reality of Jesus Christ in the world, God becoming visible to your eyes, it’s in something that looks to our eyes like death and dying.

The next statement immediately follows and it’s basically the same, just more specific. The life of Jesus is made visible in our mortal flesh. So it’s our mortality that visibly reveals Jesus. As Denzel Washington would say, “You never see a Uhaul following a hearse. You cannot create yourself, or sustain yourself. You and I are finite and limited. And as we see that about each other, are visibly seeing the reality of Jesus Christ.

So, this naturally begs the question. Where do you look for God? This question of God sightings comes up a little in the church. It’s usually a part of our bible school program, where the kids are encouraged to look for God. More often than not, this is how we open our church council meetings. Share a God sighting that you had this month. This week in confirmation we were studying the Psalms a little bit and so I asked the kids to share their favorite songs. And I was expecting some superficial poppy nothings. But a couple of the songs had to do with the reality of death and dying. Pretty interesting that this subject is so meaningful to them. I’m not sure that they would see, that this is seeing the reality of Jesus visibly. But still, It seems that God may be more visible to our eyes than we might be aware of. Paul is telling us where to look. It’s in what reveals our mortality. Our limitations.

I think of course that we often look for God elsewhere. And that’s a big part of the story of Jesus isn’t it? Oh as long there was miracles, he had big crowds who believed. As long as Jesus was successful he had followers, but when the death came, he lost them all. So they missed who Jesus really was. Because he came in the form of a limited and finite person, who was mortal. And nothing about the way these people viewed God prepared them to see God in that. They wamted their God for miracles, for success, for winning, for power and control. See, but Paul is saying here that’s not where Jesus life is revealed. Where you see visibly in the world, is in his mortal flesh. In his death. Not miracles, not power, not control. And saying is sure I think as we get older. The day that you face your own death, that is the day you begin to live.

In our day, it’s easy to see the way that we have a hard time with Paul’s teaching. The most obvious example is the way we worship youth. Every other commercial on television is for a work out bike, or a buns slimming machine, you name it, it’s all a way to avoid what Paul is saying is the visible presence of Jesus in the world. I’m not moralizing here or being critical. As much as anyone I am determined to try anyway to keep myself healthy as my human limitations become more and more visible. The make up industry is the same, just product after product designed to hide those obvious signs as we get older of our mortality. Everything starts to sag and so many head to the surgeon. I’m not putting it down at all, or standing in judgement, that’s not the point at all. I’m not finger pointing here at this.

But, it can be a real effort to avoid facing the reality of Jesus Christ and a life in his spirit. Fighting against death is one thing, avoiding it is another, and to the degree that we avoid, or are afraid of looking honesty at ourselves and our human limitations, that is the degree to which it becomes hard for us to see God. Paul is saying that those new wrinkles are visible signs of the life of Jesus made visible in our bodies. A witness to the power of his love that shared our weaknesses. But we can be ashamed of them instead. Embarrased by them. Looking to hide them. That’s where the problem comes.

There is however something a little more important than wrinkles that this speaks to. Because the notion that it is our human limitations that are the visible presence of Jesus in the world would be a teaching would transform our society were it to be believed. Our churches would be transformed Because our religious culture is often plagued by the notion that what Christianity is primarily about is right from wrong. And so we are under a tremendous sort of peer pressure in the church to be right. No one wants to be wrong these days. Wrong is weak. Being right is the way that our culture is becoming ever more determined to be.

But the fact of the matter is, that there is no belief system, or set of answers that is perfect in our world. All of our beliefs are a part of our mortal flesh. Our understandings of anything are limited and finite. Who really understands how to teach our children, or deal with poverty? There is no one size fits all cookie cutter answer. And furthermore, every study that comes out that deals with marriage or family life, or conflict resolution, all pretty much says the same thing. Being right is the surefire way to destroy your family, or your marriage, or your church for that matter. All healthy conflict resolution, is built on the ability to confess that you don’t understand fully, or have all the answers. That you are human, and therefore limited in your perception and ability to understand. When you can reveal that about yourself, that you are limited and finite, division and hostility begin to be overcome. The life of Jesus is revealed in your mortal flesh.

But we can go even deeper. Because as we get older, Life can be very difficult, and we face many painful problems, and suffer deep losses and rejections. You can live with illnesses a long time. That’s surely what happened to Paul isn’t it? Afllicted in every way, often perplexed and questioning, struck down in so many ways. He was God’s Apostle, God’s man, wrote most of the New Testament, and yet a part of his witness was that he at times longed for death, the stress and problems were overwhelming. Many people find themselves here, its not uncommon. Paul had a rough life. And we do to, a lot of us carry that around in our bodies don’t we as we get older? It’s hard to get at, this part of our lives. It’s the source of not a few of those wrinkles isn’t it? Those areas where we suffer. The death of Jesus is in our bodies in the blows that life brings to us.

It almost seems inappropriate. How in the world can we come to believe that this is where the life of Jesus is revealed? That living though these things is how we become Christ-like and connect to the power of God? But you can see it, if you look. You see it in the soldiers who have come through combat together. You see it in people as they gather around the death bed. Struggling with illness and depression and fear. Death indeed is at work in us, but as we share it together it forges bonds of love and friendship.. A life, a love, an appreciation for each other. Old hostilities often begin to heal. You see what is important. It just seems to be true that we carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. We’re having communion today. And the food that reveals Jesus is his body and blood. His flesh. The part of him that could hurt and suffer brings the deepest connections of love and healing.

And today of course we will remember those we have lost this year. Who revealed to us their mortal flesh, each one. Who shared with us their mortality. That they were limited and finite. But what we celebrate today is that as we remember them, and the way that they shared in the death of Jesus, life of Jesus begins to be revealed. It’s like our hearts begin to be opened and where there was death, now there begins to be life, and love.

It's always a surprising message it seems. That our weaknesses and imperfections, our mortality shared is the visible presence of Jesus in the world. But all you have to do is simply be here today and share in the memory of those who have shared the gift with us. Because the life of Jesus is revealed exactly there. For there is no rejection, or condemnation, or shame. Only love. Amen.