

"To God alone the glory."

Romans 8:18, John 17:1-11

A sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

There is a phrase, "To God alone the Glory." It is sometimes used as a motto. We see it on buildings. We ask ourselves: "Where's the glory?" We are not talking about pictures where there is a halo or a nimbus. There's a girl's name: Gloria. But where is the glory? We have hymns with glory in them: "Mine eyes have seen the glory!" That raises the question: Where is the glory? Where is it operative?

It is easier in the Old Testament. In the Book of Numbers the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night went with them. And when the temple was built, 1 Kings 8:10-11 says that "the glory of the Lord" filled the temple.

When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, in the vision that Ezekiel has in chapter 43 of it all coming back, the sign of it all is that the glory comes back.

Where is the glory? The key for us, as we look at this, is in Romans 8:18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

There are three things in the texts that are mentioned. First, the glory is already here, but it is hidden. It is first here because we have the Holy Spirit. He speaks about the Holy Spirit in the present tense. This is something you and I have because he has come to us in Baptism. Present tense.

And it also is impossible to divide the Holy Spirit up in pieces so that you say: "Well I have some of the Holy Spirit but not all of it." First of all, we have the Holy Spirit.

Second, Romans 8:15-16 says that because we have the Holy Spirit, we then speak to God as our Father, "*Abba*," our dad. Because we pray "Our Father," "Our Dad," that means that we are children of God, children by adoption. Not children of Abraham. But children of God by adoption.

A father once said to his adopted son: "Other fathers have to take what they get, but I chose you." This adopting love of God for us is important here. We are therefore "heirs." It goes on to call us "fellow heirs with Christ." That is really important because Christ has already gone ahead.

God, when he claims us as his adopted children and makes us heirs with Christ who has already gone ahead, changes everything. When Jesus died and went on to be at the right hand of the Father, he did not stop being a truly human being. And we then because we are in him, we are already heirs with him.

Thus there are these three: First, we have the Holy Spirit. Second, we are adopted. Third, we are fellow heirs with Christ. We have these three things already but they are hidden.

There are three clarifications that need to be made about this. We have a certain idea that there are certain stages: First we repent, then we believe, and then God saves us, then we live a certain way. But here it says: There are not stages; it is all done. At the end of this section in Romans 8:29-30 it says:

“Those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . . and those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified.” (The aorist tense conveys the state of being.)

In 2 Cor 2:18 it says: “We are being changed from one degree of glory into another.” Present tense. In 1 Cor 6:11: “You were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God.” Eph 1:4: “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” It is all completed. It is all done.

In the raising of Lazarus in John 11:4 and 40, it says: “This is for the glory of God.” But the glory of God is not in raising Lazarus. Yes, the raising of Lazarus is a sign but he died again. And the glory of God is not about the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. That is about the tribe, the people of God who continue in themselves. Not the resurrection. The glory is found where Jesus says: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). That is the glory.

Luther, when he preached the funeral sermon in 1532 for Elector John, talked about the real death and the little death. The real death is the death that Jesus died on Calvary. It says in John 19:30: “It is finished.” Not to forget about “the little death,” but it has to be seen in perspective as to what is real death, and what is really important because he has risen and death is conquered.

There are three ways we can be side-tracked about this.

The first one has to do with what is called “rumors of angels.” There was a book of that title by a Lutheran layman, Peter Berger. And there was a movie with that title.

We would like to think there is some place where God would lift the hem of his garment and let us see a little bit of his glory now. Luther in his Commentary on Galatians:

“This is the reason our theology is certain: It snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive” (LW 26:387).

And because it does not depend on us but on him, therefore it is certain, therefore we are free. Paul writes in Romans 8:21 about “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” It is ours now, but it is hidden.

The second way we can go wrong is by saying: “I want to get involved in that glory now.” On the building of a Lutheran college there is this slogan: “To God alone the glory.” Above that in bigger letters it says: “Johnson Hall.” The question is: To whom is the glory?

This problem is also seen in an old gospel song: “You’ve got to have a glory in everything you do.” Then it is also partly “my glory.” It can happen even in the hymn: “Rock of Ages.” The third verse begins: “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling.” But do we cling rightly enough? Tightly enough? Thank God it is not up to us to cling rightly and tightly enough. What he does in Jesus Christ is he snatches us, in spite of us, like the mother cat who grabs the kitten by the scruff of the neck in spite of the kitten itself.

The third way we can go wrong is by starting to speculate and make principles and ideas out of this glory. We can be tempted to say: “What this means is that God is all-powerful or God is all-loving,” and in doing that lose the fact that the glory of God is in what he does, and it is in his doing on the cross.”

Both in John 12:28 and John 17:1 Jesus says, “Now Father, glorify your name.” The glory is the cross and what he does there.

We come back to the key in Romans 8:18: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” It is all there. The glory is complete, but it is hidden. This same message can be seen in Colossians 3:3-4: “For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

That comes directly to us as fellow heirs with Christ. Luke 24:13-35 tells what happened after the crucifixion and resurrection on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples were walking, puzzling over what had happened when a third man joined them. They did not know him but told him all that had happened. Then their eyes were opened and they knew him in the breaking of bread. As fellow heirs with Christ, there is in the breaking of bread this down payment on the kingdom to come. We as fellow heirs with him have the glory already now in his breaking of bread.

Therefore we sing:

"Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son!"

"Beneath the cross of Jesus, I long to take my stand . . . My glory all the cross."

"All glory, laud, and honor To you, redeemer, king!"

"All glory be to God on high!"

Amen