

## Glory

John 17:1-11

A Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Easter

Today is all about glory. It is the last Sunday of the Easter season. Last Thursday, May 14th, was the Festival of the Ascension, which marks the end of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and the bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Today we celebrate the fact that the victory is his, and we are in him, and therefore the victory is ours as well.

When we talk about "glory," we need to bring in "holiness" because they belong together. Holiness is that which is beyond us. It is only in God and something we cannot even know because we are unholy.

Glory and holiness are often described as a light so bright that it is blinding. In that great hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," the third verse captures this well: "Though the eye made blind by sin thy glory may not see." This is like 1 Timothy 6:16: "He who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see."

Glory, holiness in inaccessible light are signs of God's presence in the Old Testament.

The ancient Hebrews were led through their 40 years in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day (providing shade in the desert heat) and a pillar of fire by night (providing light for travel). Despite the people's faithlessness, the promise was that "the earth will be filled with the glory of God" (Numbers 14:21).

When the temple was built, "the glory of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10-11) filled the temple and the people worshipped the Lord "in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2; 96:9; 1 Chronicles 16:29; see also Psalm 27:4).

But Jerusalem was eventually sacked and the temple destroyed.

In the vision that Ezekiel has of it all coming back, the sign of it all coming back is the return of the glory: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shown with his glory ... as the glory of the Lord entered the temple the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (Ezekiel 43: 2-5).

Centuries later there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night when suddenly the glory of the Lord shone around them. Soon the sky was filled with angels singing: "Glory, glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:9, 14).

Where is the glory now?

In John 12, before the crucifixion, Jesus says: "What shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:27-28).

And in our text today from John 17, Jesus prays: "Father, the hour has come, glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee." The glory of God is the cross and what he does.

When Jesus crucified, raised, and then went on to be at the right hand of the Father, he did not stop being a truly human being. He remains truly human, and we then, because we are in him, we are heirs with him in glory.

When we are baptized, we become adopted sons and daughters, fellow heirs with Christ. He invites us to call his Father, our Father. Just as the Lord became one of us, so he has a particular identity, a particular name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Having God's name means having access to him, his power and his providence. As our text says of Jesus: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:2-3).

And because the victory is his, and we are in him, the victory is ours, too.

Where is the glory?

The glory is hidden and revealed.

There are three points that need to be made about this.

First, it means being a Christian is not a process with stages in which first we repent, then we believe, and then God saves us, then we live a certain way. No, the gift and the glory are all given at once, as Paul writes in Romans 8:29-30:

"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."

In 2 Cor 2:18 it says: "We are being changed from one degree of glory into another." Present tense. It's happening now because it's not up to us; he is at work in us. 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."

And in Ephesians 1:4: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world." It is all completed. It is all done.

Second, it means the glory is not about restoration. In the account of 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 remember he died again.

And the glory of God is not about the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 either. That is about the tribe, the people of God who continue in themselves (a type of restoration; God's restoring everything).

The resurrection is different. The resurrection is about a new creation, a new heaven and earth, a world, a life not confined the brokenness and death of this world.

The glory is found where Jesus says: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). That is the glory. So, like the Psalmist of old, but in a New Testament way, we come to church to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," the holiness of the cross and resurrection.

And third, his glory is ours now, but it is hidden.

In our text from 1 Peter 4, it says: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you . . . but rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed . . . the spirit of glory and of God is upon you.”

We share in his sufferings by having been baptized into him. It doesn’t depend upon us doing something more to make it work; it all depends on him and what he has done.

As Paul writes: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).

To be sure, we may wish that we could shine with glory now, too.

But in the Christian life the glory is hidden. And the desire to break through the hiddenness is itself dangerous: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1).

Those who wish to be praised by other people have their reward: “Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward” (Matthew 6:2).

The goodness or the Christianness of our lives is, in fact, hidden even from ourselves. We can’t see it; we can’t judge it. And thank God, we don’t need to. He knows how broken we are.

Therefore, don’t hold back: “Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Our situation is not that different from those first disciples 2,000 years ago. Remember what happened that first Easter afternoon. Two of his followers were walking away from Jerusalem. Everything had gone wrong. The one in whom they had put their hope, had been crucified. It had been a disaster.

But as they were puzzling over what had happened, a stranger joined them, and he stayed with him for Supper. There in the breaking of bread, their eyes were opened, and they knew him. There’s the glory, even then it is both hidden and revealed.

So, too, for us. He is living now and is here to preside over his Supper. He gives us this bread and wine as a token, a down payment on his kingdom of glory to come.

The victory is his, and because we are in him, the victory is ours, too.

Amen