

***Glorify Your Name***  
**A Sermon on John 12:20-33**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 18, 2018**

**Introduction**

We are now entering the second part of Lent. The first four weeks of Lent focus on repentance; now we turn to the cross.

Today's text takes place immediately after Jesus enters into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and immediately before the Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

These are the last words of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospel of John. It is the most concentrated collection of sayings on the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

The key word in today's text is glory. It appears five times. Glory is not something that mainline Christians like to talk about much. It sounds boastful. We prefer Luther's theology of the cross to a theology of glory. I would like to confront our reservations about glory head on today.

**First Move: The Hour of Glorification Has Come**

Turning over the tables in the Temple is the event that leads to Jesus' arrest in the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. Not so in the Gospel of John. That takes place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, right after the wedding at Cana in Chapter 2. When Mary and I went to see the Jesus Seminar on the Road last month in Wichita, one of the speakers was Brandon Scott, our New Testament professor in seminary. He said that the Gospel of John reads like all the pages fell on the floor and someone haphazardly put them back together. The order doesn't make any sense.

The raising of Lazarus is the event that leads to Jesus' death in the Gospel of John. When Mary and Martha tell Jesus that their brother Lazarus has died, Jesus says, "This sickness is not to death but for the glory of God, in order that the son of God might be glorified through it." After Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, many of the Judeans who came with Mary and beheld what he did, believed in him. When the Pharisees and the chief priests heard of the miracle, they conspired to kill Jesus. They said, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

Now their fears are realized. Some Greeks approach Philip at Passover and tell him that they want to meet Jesus. Jesus has limited his ministry to Jews up to this point in the Gospel. The Greeks are probably God-fearers. They attend the synagogue and support it, but they have not converted to Judaism. They are in Jerusalem to attend Passover.

They approach Philip, perhaps because he has a Greek name, perhaps because he and Andrew were the first two disciples that Jesus called in the Gospel of John.

When Philip and Andrew take the request by the Greeks to Jesus, he seems to disregard the request. There is no meeting between Jesus and the Greeks. The author John avoids a meeting, perhaps because he has no tradition about one. It is too early yet in the Jesus movement for the drawing in of Gentiles.

Jesus responds by telling Philip and Andrew that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Jesus refers to himself, or better, John refers to Jesus, as the Son of Man. In Jewish eschatology the Son of Man is a supernatural being who comes down to earth from heaven to inaugurate a new era when God will restore creation to its original goodness. Jesus is not afraid of suffering and dying. He knows that he will return to God in heaven. The Son of Man will be glorified by being lifted up. He will be lifted up in three ways—on the cross, through the Resurrection and through the Ascension. He will be glorified because all people will see that God is revealed through him and that he is returning to heaven to be with God. That will draw all people to him.

John collects three isolated sayings about the death of Jesus from the Synoptic Gospels and the letters of Paul and reinterprets them.

The first saying is, “Unless a grain of wheat falls and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Paul has a saying about a grain of wheat in 1 Corinthians 15 when he is talking about what kind of body people will have in the Resurrection. Paul says that the seed you sow is not the body it will become—it ripens into wheat. John shifts the emphasis—the grain of wheat must fall and die or else it abides alone. Abide is a loaded word in the Gospel of John. It is a translation of the Greek word μένω. John uses μένω to express the permanence of the relationship between Father and Son and between Son and a follower of Christ. Permanence is one of the attributes of God in the Old Testament. God’s steadfast loves endures forever. Humans on the other hand are changeable and temporary. They are fickle and unpredictable. People are changed when they believe in Jesus--they abide with him forever.

The second saying: “The one who loves his soul [or his life] destroys it, and the one who hates his soul [or his life] in this world will preserve it for eternal life.”

There is a similar saying about saving your life by losing it in all three Synoptic Gospels. John adds that souls are saved for eternal life with Jesus.

The third saying is a revision of the verse that is the centerpiece of Mark's gospel, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." John adds, "If anyone might deacon me, let him follow me, and where I am, there also the deacon of me will be; if anyone might deacon me, the father will honor him." Whoever deacons Jesus will be with Jesus, and God will honor him. Again, John introduces eternal life with Jesus.

Then we have a sudden shift to John's version of Gethsemane. "Just now my soul has been shaken." That is about as much suffering and doubt as we see in Jesus in the Gospel of John. He immediately dismisses the idea. "What should I say? Father, save me from this hour?" Jesus is almost ridiculing the idea of avoiding the cross. The Gospel of John describes Jesus as the preexistent Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus is confident that the cross is his reason for coming to earth. "Rather for this I came into this hour." Jesus' will is in perfect harmony with God's will throughout the Gospel of John.

The key verse is: "Father, glorify your name." We will talk about that more in a minute.

Then we hear the voice of God for the only time in the Gospel of John. There is no Transfiguration in the Gospel of John and no voice coming from heaven at Jesus' baptism. A voice out of heaven says, "I have glorified and I will glorify again." This is an ellipsis, a common rhetorical device in Greek. Certain words are omitted from a sentence that are deemed to be superfluous or understood from context. Here, the omitted word is name. "I have glorified [my name] and I will glorify [it] again." English translations can't resist the temptation to take out the ellipsis and put the omitted word back in. The point of the ellipsis is to emphasize the omitted word by omitting it.

The crowd hears the voice and is not sure what to make of it. They know that they have witnessed an epiphany, but they can't see God's presence through Jesus. They say it must be thunder, which was a common metaphor for the voice of God, or it could be an angel speaking for God.

The words out of heaven were heard only by Jesus after his baptism in the Gospel of Mark. Not so in John. Jesus says, "Not for me this voice came about but for you." The eschatological moment has arrived.

The Son of Man has come to unify heaven and earth. The righteous will have a place abiding with Jesus in the new creation. "The ruler of the world will be cast outside." The Greek verb for cast aside is the same verb that it used when Jesus casts

out demons. Jesus is referring to Satan as the ruler of a fallen creation. In the new age Satan will be cast out and God will take a more active role in ruling over creation. It is a similar idea to the domain of sin that we see in Paul. Humanity is moved from the domain of Satan to the domain of life under God.

## **Second Move: A New Definition of Glory**

We have to remember that the New Testament is written in a foreign language, koine Greek. It should sound strange when it is translated instead of sounding like modern English. It also is written with a theology that seems foreign to us today: apocalyptic eschatology. Most mainline Christians don't expect the imminent return of Jesus to usher in a new age in which God rules over creation.

Glory is one of the words we struggle with. It sounds triumphalistic. A God who is worth worshiping shouldn't need praise.

Glory in the Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew word, *kavod*, which has a root meaning of weight or importance. To have glory is to have weight or to have importance. It was used to refer to kings and to God. The primary attribute of kings and of God was their power. A primary image of God in the Old Testament is as a king or ruler.

The New Testament adds a new meaning, radiance or brilliance. It refers to heavenly or divine radiance. God is invisible, and the glory of God is what makes God visible to humans. It is God's self-revelation to humans. Glorify your name means make your presence known.

The New Testament also adds that the glory of God is reflected through Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels, the glory of Jesus is apparent only after the Resurrection and in the Transfiguration, which is an anticipation of the Resurrection. In the Gospel of John, the glory of Jesus is present in his earthly ministry as well as at the Resurrection. The voice of God speaks in the past tense in today's text, "I have glorified," which probably refers to the signs in Jesus' ministry: turning water into wine, feeding the 5,000, walking on water, healing a blind man, raising Lazarus from the dead. The future tense, "I will glorify again," refers to glorification through the cross and the Resurrection.

People can see the glory of Jesus during his ministry only through the eyes of faith. They can make the connection: God's presence is at work in Jesus. The crowd can't make this connection because they have no faith that Jesus is the word made flesh. Judgment comes at the time of the cross and the Resurrection. John believes that all people should then be able to see the glory of God shining through Jesus.

How do we translate this apocalyptic eschatology into a contemporary theology? Unless we are going to condemn the people of other religious faiths and people of no faith, we still need to understand that it is possible to see the glory of Jesus only through the eyes of faith and that only Christians have this faith. We are not expecting the Last Judgment to take place in the near future. We are not expecting all divisions between people to disappear and all people to recognize Jesus as the Messiah of God, who rules over all nations.

We can make the same move that the rabbis made with the kingdom of God in Jewish apocalyptic thought. When the Temple was destroyed, the rabbis came to understand the kingdom of God as an internal recognition of what is not obvious to the eyes. There is no apocalyptic event; God's kingship is something that one must accept upon oneself. God's kingship is internalized. Each of us must recognize God's rule in our lives.

The new move that John makes that still works today is that the glory of God is reflected in us when we deacon Jesus.

We share in the life of eternity and reflect God's glory when we recognize Jesus as the center of our lives. Yes, we have respect for people of other religious traditions. That doesn't diminish our own commitment to Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life for us as Christians.

Interfaith work is important, but Christians are little more than secular humanists when they are afraid to talk about Christ. The Gospel of John reminds us that we are living in the shadows if we refuse to commit openly and decisively to Christ.

Millennials can sense that. They have stopped coming to church, in part because they don't find Christ in the church. Perhaps they have had bad experiences with church and assume all churches are like that. Perhaps they are judging all churches based on what they see of the Religious Right. Perhaps they believe that you don't need Jesus to be a good person.

*Resident Aliens*, by Hauerwas and Willimon, reminds us that Christians need to focus on being the church. We need to focus on Christ and do the work of Christ. That is what will draw people to Jesus.

We deacon Jesus when we let go of our pretensions of power and privilege. Those are satanic impulses. They destroy our soul. We deacon Jesus when we confess that we can't find our way on our own. We have the humility to admit that we don't have all the answers. We are not seeking glory for ourselves. We are seeking communion with God.

We find our True Self when we share in the non-violent, non-judgmental love that Jesus has for all people. It reflects the love of God that runs through each and every person and each and every part of creation.

## **Conclusion**

Glory is a good thing when what we mean by glory is revealing the presence of God among us. Worshiping an invisible God is hard, and we long for God to come out in the open and make it easy for us to experience the sacred.

God came out in the open through Jesus in his public ministry and through Jesus on the cross. The eyes of faith can see that. God also is glorified in us when we reflect the love of God that is made known through following Jesus. That will draw people to Jesus.

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