

GLORIFICATION

Sermon for Easter 7A—Jn 17:1-11

LPC, 6/1/14

Are you familiar with the song “Rise and shine and give God your glory-glory”? If you don’t know that one, as good Episcopalians you probably are at least are familiar with the words to the *Gloria Patri*, traditionally intoned at the end of the psalm at Morning Prayer services: “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.” And I know you know the words to the *Gloria in Excelsis*, because we said it this morning: “Glory be to God on high.” When you think about it these formulations are downright weird.

It’s not that God is not glorious. God is the origin and definition of glory. But these songs are not about God’s glory. They are about we humans giving glory to God. How is that possible?

In the first place, God is all-glorious. Too quote yet another song, “O worship the King, all-glorious above.” In other words, God is not wanting for glory. God does not need any more glory, from us or from any other source. In the second place, these songs are about giving, or at least rendering, our glory to God. That’s just ridiculous. Even if you or I had glory to call our own, our glory is inconsequential compared to God’s glory. There is nothing our glory can do for God. Giving God our glory is like thinking we can help the ocean hydrate by spitting in it.

Perhaps it would help to define what glory is. Glory is one of those words that is easy to use without thinking about. But when you do think about it, you find yourself in a veritable maze of meaning. What is glory?

Glory is a complex concept connoting honor and brightness and power and greatness. Certainly these are attributes of God. God is deserving of all honor. God lives in light inaccessible. God’s power is absolute. God is great. Therefore God is glorious. So long as you believe in the Christian God, that much is self-evident.

God is glory and the source of all glory. God imparts God’s glory to aspects of the created world, particularly those parts which are bright and great and beautiful: like the sun, or the sea, or a vast mountain vista. God the Father also imparts God’s glory to his Son Jesus Christ, which is one of the themes of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John. We heard some of this last Sunday and are hearing more of it today.

Here Jesus says that the Father gave the Son authority and the power to make God known to God’s people, thus making eternal life available to all people. In this sense God has already glorified the Son, by sharing authority and power with him

But Jesus talks as if his own glorification has yet to come. “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son.” And later: “So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.”

It would be reasonable to suppose from this that Jesus expects that his glorification awaits him in heaven, when he returns there for good after his resurrection. Certainly we Christians believe that in Jesus’ Ascension, which we heard described in this morning’s excerpt from the

book of Acts, the Son returned to the heavenly glory in which he existed from the beginning, before he came into the world as the human being Jesus of Nazareth. But he did not return there unchanged.

Remember that this speech takes place the night before Jesus' arrest, trial and execution. Christian doctrine holds that it was, in fact, in this very humiliation that Jesus was fully glorified. That's right. Jesus' full glory lay not in his heavenly home, but happened on the cross. The Father glorified Jesus as he died on the Cross. Can you say, "Paradox"?

I say again: Jesus' glory was on the Cross. I can understand if you don't believe me, or if you have trouble getting your head around this concept. I have trouble getting *my* head around this concept. Bear with me as I introduce another mental picture that can perhaps elucidate.

My whole family does not get together very often: I and my brother and sister, with all our spouses and children, and our mother/ grandmother. I particularly remember one reunion however, when my father was still alive and my sister's and my children were young and noisy. We all went to dinner at a restaurant, and sat at a very long table which the staff kindly set up for us. Happy chaos ensued, with all of us having a high old time in each other's company. You probably know how it is.

Anyway, there sat my mother at the end of the table, just smiling beatifically. She didn't need to contribute to the (rather loud) conversation. She was absolutely radiant in the company of all the people she loved best in the world, all happy and getting along with each other. Later, when the three of us kids talked about it, the phrase that came up was, "Mom sure was in her glory, wasn't she?"

My mother's glory on this occasion elucidates the two concepts I've been talking about this morning. One is the idea of human beings having glory that is worth giving to God. My mother's glory on this occasion was that she was filled with love. How can we human beings render glory to the all-glorious God in any way that has meaning? By being filled with love. And if we can't actually be filled with love all the time, we can at least share with God what love we have.

Secondly, my mother's glory came from a profound sharing with the people she loved. She would not have been in her glory if she'd stayed home, or dined at another table, where things would surely have been much calmer. She was in her glory because she was in the close company of her family.

Jesus on the cross was in his glory because he was in the closest of company with the people he loved. No God had ever before dared to be with his people to the extent of suffering as they do, to die as they do. By this ultimate and intimate act, the Son united himself to humankind for ever.

I don't expect to convince you, if you are not inclined ever to think of Christ's cross as his glory. I just invite you to contemplate a love so great that misery in our company is a greater glory than honor and power apart from us.

Such is Christ's love. Such is Christ's glory.