

DISPLAYS OF GLORY

We know from the gospels that Jesus prayed often. And, on several occasions, we even know the content of Jesus' prayers as he turned to God for strength and guidance. In response to his disciples asking him to teach them how to pray, Jesus gave an answer, which we know and pray as the Lord's Prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked God, if it were possible, to take the cup of suffering from him; then, in the very next breath, Jesus prayed, "Yet, not my will but yours be done," and so yielded himself to the Father's will.

In today's scripture lesson found in John 17, we are able to listen in as Jesus concluded his time together with his disciples there in the upper room. A meal had been shared, the new commandment to love one another had been given, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been instituted, and Jesus had instructed the disciples on all that they needed to know and do in the future. There was one thing left to do. Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed for his disciples – those gathered around him in the upper room and those, who would gather in his name in every age (present company included!).

There is a great deal we could focus on within this prayer: there's the reality that Jesus' hour (of suffering and death) had finally come; there's Jesus' mission and relationship to God; there's mention of eternal life; there's the gift of the disciples that God gave to Jesus; and, there's Jesus' plea that God would protect the disciples in a hostile world. The rest of John 17 contains many more petitions. However, in the passage for today, since Jesus used the word glory or glorify six different times, something very important is being said and that's what grabs our attention today.

To give glory to God or to glorify God's name, in the Bible, was born out of the people's experience of the presence of God on earth. In response to God being in the midst of God's people, they were moved to glorify God – to worship, exalt, or honor God's name. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, translates the word glorify to mean, "display God's bright splendor." Another modern translation of the word glorify is to "enhance God's reputation in the world."

In the Old Testament, when people sensed God's presence among them, they glorified God by piling up stones and making shrines in order to mark, remember, and worship at these holy places where God had been revealed to them. Following the giving of the Law of God to Moses at Mt. Sinai, there was a need for a portable shrine since the Hebrew people were on the move, traveling through the wilderness. Thus, the ark came into existence; it was a receptacle for the tablets on which God's commandments were written, and the ark also served as a throne for God's dwelling place among the Israelite people. In time, the ark was placed inside the tabernacle and eventually it found a home within the more permanent temple, which was located in the Holy City, Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, God's glory was revealed or made known in Jesus. When people looked at Jesus, they saw the glory – the very presence of God. In fact, early on in his gospel, John writes that "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen (God's) glory..." (1:14). Throughout the New Testament, Christ is presented as the glory of God's presence made visible on earth to those whose eyes are open to see it and receive Jesus as Lord. Jesus reveals and glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son through Jesus' faithful and obedient death on the cross.

Then, in the tenth verse of today's lesson, Jesus prayed concerning his disciples, "I have been glorified in them." Jesus is saying, then and now, that his disciples – you and I – have been given the high privilege and awesome responsibility of glorifying God on earth. We have been chosen and called to be the means by which God's presence is made known today among all people. As Christ reflects the presence of God on earth, so we, who are in Christ and Christ is in us, are to reflect and show forth the living presence of God on earth in our day.

In his book, *With Wings Of Eagles*, Dr. Richard C. Hoefler helps to explain this passage by calling to mind the sixth chapter of Judges wherein the Lord ordered Gideon to go and rescue Israel from the Midianites. When Gideon protested, the Lord answered, "I will be with you." And the Lord did. With only one hundred men Gideon attacked and conquered the large army of the Midianites, and the people of God were free. In Judges 6:34 we read that "the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon" and gave him the power to fight and win the battle. In the American Standard Version of the Bible there is a marginal note at verse 34, which points out that what is literally being said here is, God clothed himself with Gideon. Dr. Hoefler writes: "What a terrific image – God clothed himself with Gideon – and that is what our Lord meant when he said, 'I am glorified in them.' God clothes himself with us. We are the clothing God puts on to work God's mighty acts in our world in our day." (Pg. 86)

Jesus prayed for his disciples and he prays still that our lives – what we think, say and do – will reflect God's goodness, forgiveness, patience, kindness, care, and God's love for all people. As we live holy lives (in our homes, in the classroom, at work, and in other public places), we give glory to God and God is glorified in us and by us. The Spirit of God is within us and is clothed with us so that - as we live and love in Christ's name - God is glorified more and more. You and I are the means by which God's glory is displayed in and to and for the world.

I read that there are over two million people incarcerated in the U. S. In one area, a group of older women gather once a week and bake a huge batch of cookies and then take turns delivering the cookies to the local prison. The sources of crime and the reasons for incarceration are complex; it is a huge problem, which will not be solved by these older women showing up at the jail with some chocolate chip cookies. And yet, the warden of the prison says that those cookies are transforming that prison one person at a time. Many of the inmates are receiving a gift for the very first time in their lives, an undeserved, intimate, tangible act of love. God is at work, through those women, who are hard at work baking and, in their own way, displaying God's glory.

Jill realized that for years she had been carrying a dark burden of resentment toward an acquaintance, Linda, who had once spread false rumors about her. Jill struggled with the problem of trying to let go of her resentment and forgive Linda. It took a great effort but, one day, putting the injury behind her, she called Linda and chatted with her in a friendly way. Finding Linda had become housebound with severe arthritis, Jill picked up some flowers and went to see her. Although they will never become close friends, they nevertheless had a pleasant visit. Then, a strange thing happened to Jill. As she closed Linda's door, she felt an indescribable peace fill her heart and an exquisite happiness flood her soul. She said, "Despite my being middle-aged and a bit overweight, I felt like hopping and skipping down Linda's front steps like a ten-year-old." She smiled at the memory and then, becoming more serious, she said, "It seems as if the Lord had just been waiting for me to be emptied of resentment so the Lord could pour in joy" (as told by Elizabeth Rockwood). Whether Jill realized it or not, she became

the clothes God put on that day to be present with Linda and to bring about reconciliation between the two women.

Today, God's glory is manifested especially here at the Table, within the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, where the risen Christ is spiritually present with his disciples. Let us feast with the Lord and one another. Then, let us go and show forth the glory of God by the way we live and love. In all that we do, may we glorify the Lord, and thus, do our part in bringing to fulfillment Jesus' prayer as found in John 17 - to the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Randall C. Stevens
First Presbyterian Church/Martinsville, VA
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