

The Seventh Sunday of Easter: Ascension Sunday  
May 8, 2016  
Year C, RCL

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Acts 16:16-34  
Revelation 22: 12-21  
John 17:20-26

Jesus prayed to the Father, “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou has sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.” In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The words of today’s Gospel are those of Jesus’ prayer to the Father in the Garden after the Last Supper. Let me change the point of view from Jesus’ to ours. The glory which God has given Jesus, Jesus has given to us, that we may be one even as God the Father and Jesus are one—Jesus in us and God in Jesus, that we may become perfectly one with one another and with God, so that the world may know that God has sent Jesus and has loved us even as he has loved Jesus. That is people out there will come to believe that God loves us when they see that we are one.

The passage today from the Gospel of John has the kind of interweaving of themes that is the habit of this writer. They wind about each other like the knotwork in Hiberno-Saxon art. Three themes emerge, three strands that get braided together: Unity, Glory, Love.

First, let us look more closely at the idea of Glory. Frederick Buechner suggests that glory is to God what style is to an artist. It is the way in which God expresses Godself. It is the character of God’s work, the flavor of what God does. It reveals God’s identity and being more adequately than mere words or description. One appreciates it not by a casual glance at the

work, but by contemplation and meditation of the masterpiece. So when the Psalmist says, “Let the heavens tell of the Glory of God”, he is not merely being poetic, but calling us to a vision. Glory is the shining, the brightness, the radiance of God.

The Greek word for “glory” is *doxa*. It means reputation or even opinion. One’s glory is what people think of you. It is what people see in you. The Glory of God is the shining, the power, the love, the joy of God. This is what Jesus wants us to share. Indeed, it is as we the Body of Christ share in God’s shining, power, love and joy, that the world will know that Jesus is God.

And the incredible part is that we are given that same glory. “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them.” It is our end, our purpose, our goal: to be glorified. Glory is God’s purpose for us. It is what we were made for. Each and every one of us has a destiny to become a creature so clothed in the glory and splendor of God that should we meet one such now we would be driven to prostrate ourselves in worship. God wants us to become much more than we could ever imagine, much less hope for, on our own.

Jesus’ story is our story. Where he has gone we shall follow. “I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am.” The Ascension is our story too.

The incredible thing is that Jesus is speaking as if we had already been given this glory. “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one.” We already have the glory, and the purpose of it is so that we may be one. And it is our unity that will proclaim God’s love to the world.

That we may be one even as the Father and the Son are one. In the three and a half years that I have had the joy of being among you, I have heard from time to time of people who have difficulties with other people in this parish. In some cases the causes of hurt go

back several, sometimes many, years. In other cases they are current annoyances. I have listened to the stories, I hope with sympathy. In a few cases I have worked to effect reconciliation. We have adopted a parish plan, in which the first value we share is love. We are going to work on the quality of our relationships. One aspect of this is for all of to be accountable for how we deal with our hurts. It is all too easy, when one feels slighted, to do nothing. We may feel that it is too small a thing to make a fuss over. Or we may be so hurt that we simply want to have as little to do with the other person as possible. Sometimes, we don't know what to do, and so other similar slights recur. And when small irritations go unattended, they grow and fester and become serious problems. Many times we cause another hurt without realizing it, much less intending it. There is a great gap between intention and effect. We all know that we can hurt people without any intention to cause harm. Similarly, when we are hurt, it is rare that the other person set out to cause us harm. There are ways to help us to listen to one another and to have our feelings be heard. I urge you to go to those who have offended you and explain your feelings. If you need help having such a conversation, please see me. I have some tools that could help.

Jesus has shared his glory with us so that we might be one with one another and with God. If we show such unity, others will be drawn to us. It is not just that we should have healthy relationships, or be at peace. God desires our unity, not because it will make us comfortable. Indeed, living in community with people who differ from us or differ with us can be uncomfortable. And if we had no differences, it would be pretty boring. God desires our unity because it is our unity that will prove God's power to the world. It is our responsibility as members of the Body of Christ to do all we can to remove any barriers to our unity. Conflict

and disagreement are normal and healthy. We need to learn how to live with them with freedom and playfulness rather than with fear and anxiety.

We say “Alleluia” all through the Easter season. We are happy that Jesus, that good man, rose from the dead. It makes for a happy ending. The good guys win in the end. Only it is not the end but the beginning. Indeed, the second reading this morning is the very end of the Bible. This ancient text ends looking to the future. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!

And God did not send his son to suffer and die so that we might be entertained. God did all this so that we might become what we were created to be. Every parent, knows this desire of God’s, at least a little. Today we remember and celebrate all mothers who know this divine truth. We love our children, we love the oddities, and individual traits of each one. We are happy when they are happy. But most of all we hope that they will do all that they are capable of, that they will fulfill their promise. And to that end we are willing to push them some, and if they are talented, quite hard. God’s plan for us is to rule over the angels. How hard must he push us? What joy there is to understand the high calling we have in Christ! But what responsibility as well. C. S. Lewis calls this “the weight of glory”.

By now it may have occurred to you that this talk of glory is merely one way to speak of the love God lavishes on us. For God gives out of love. God calls us to love. God nourishes us in love. The unity of the Church is never something to be achieved by our own efforts, but rather it derives from the prior unity of the Godhead which is the expression of its eternal love. And God’s desire for the world to see the love of God in Christ and in his Church is again, not a desire to judge or to exclude, but to invite and woo. It is important for the world to know that God has sent Jesus because Jesus is how we learn about love. In the embrace of the Church we can be enfolded in the arms of God’s love.

These three, Glory, Unity, and Love begin with God. Without God, we cannot become one, we cannot achieve glory, we cannot even love. These things become ours by gift, by grace, by sheer gift. They all start from God, and then proceed downward through Jesus to us. God gives Jesus his glory, then Jesus gives us the glory. We are to be one just as the Father and the Son are already one. Jesus is in us, as and because, the Father is already in him and he is in the Father. We are to love because the Father and the Son already love each other and that love includes us in its embrace. And finally God is not satisfied until all the world finds its heart's desire in the love of God and of the Church. Our destiny is glory, our way is love, and our witness is unity. We are called to live and proclaim the transforming love of God. Amen.