

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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ANOTHER NAME FOR GLORY

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Text of a Sermon preached Fifth Sunday of Easter

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ACTS 11:1-18 | PSALM 148

REVELATION 21:1-6 | JOHN 13:31-35

Glory is light. When God created everything with a Word, and said, let there be light, he established the glory of everything in its order. As humanity came to consciousness, as we perceived that there are lights above and lights below, waters above and waters below, there are at least two ways we speak of glory.

First, there is the glory from without, the shiny thing, what is reflected in our attention when someone says, 'look'. It is the glory we warm to as children when we hear the tales of tricksters and heroes. It is the glory we project on our parents just because they are so much bigger and capable than we are. Ultimately, because we live in this time, and this place, it is the glory of celebrity, of youth and glamour, what bursts into the spotlight and just as easily disappears as it loses our attention.

Yet also, there is the glory of that moment when we are up just before dawn, and everything is completely still, and morning wakens the sky. There is the glory just before sunset, when we have been dazzled by the fiery color of the sky, and realize, just after its greatest brilliance, that the sun has not yet set, but the sunset is over. There is the stillness of two people, a parent and a child, friend and traveling companion, two lovers, face to face, drinking in powers of the bonds between them - the loyalty, the delight, the self-sacrifice.

We find ourselves this morning considering what it must have been like for those first witnesses of the resurrection to have seen Jesus appear for the last time on this earth, and recall his words about what would come next. His voice had drawn them back together, back to their work, but in a new way. He had tarried just long enough, showing them his hands and his side, but most importantly, sitting down with them, eating and drinking with them. He had said: now wait for the Promise of the Father. John baptized with water. You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the firstborn of the dead. He returned to gather us back together, to sit us back down, to have us forgive each other, break bread together, and share the good news that God is making all things new. Especially this ability to see the glory all around us. The glory of the resurrection is the transformation of what we are looking at, the cleansing and relighting of our vision. What we are looking about needs another name.

First, I suppose, we must note how useless and insufficient are our childhood understanding of glory, of celebrity. No matter that it still captures all the attention of this fallen world. To our detriment, we waste too much attention on the shiny things, the loudest voice in the room, the passing glory of youth and wealth.

I met George Clooney once. Charming fellow. But very short. A regular guy. Thankfully, he was helping an African bishop I knew raise money for his people in exile on the border of their country. He was using that outward, superficial glory, to highlight and activate the dignity, the glory of those hidden, and suffering.

Let me put it this way, even when we here in the east go and visit Niagara Falls, or those in the west make their pilgrimage to the Grand

Canyon, we are not just going to see a wonder of the world from the outside. Deep down inside we are going, and we return again, because it is a sure and certain way to experience glory in all of its dimensions.

To be in the presence of the high waters of Niagara Falls, or the vast emptiness and depths of the Grand Canyon, is to have reality illumined not just by some awe inspiring light from without, but more importantly, from a light that comes from the center of the mystery itself. It is the light from within that finally speaks to us that we belong here, together.

After Judas had left the room on that last night Jesus spoke of glory. Why? He was telling his friends that they would have to look at everything differently. They would have to understand that all the odds were against them, that life was about to tear them apart, even as it was to do its worst to him. But he said, don't worry, when you look back, when you see it from every angle, when the light shines from without and from within, you will feel something.... That will need another name....

So how did we get here? Resurrection means that we finally able to sacrifice what matters to love the people that matter. And what Peter and the church will discover is that God shows no partiality. Everyone matters. The old tribal ways of thinking must go. The difference between Jew and Gentile must go. Even the old categories of heaven and earth must go. There will be, there is coming into being, a new heaven and a new earth.

And a new Jerusalem. That city, though, is a unity in itself. It is a bride, adorned and ready for her bridegroom. That is, each one of us, ready to receive God who wishes to come and dwell within us, to illumine us from within, to have us participate in that deeper glory that makes all things new.

Sunrise. Sunset. Thundering waters. Breathtaking canyon. The disciples heal from when Judas walks out and they don't show up. Peter stays at the house of Cornelius and eats and drinks with him. Jesus calls it love.

Glory! Look again. See the vision. Love one another, as Jesus loved us. Let love grow in the light of the true glory all around us.

