

Text: John 17: 20-26  
Title: Glory Bleeds  
Date: 06.02.19  
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Kurt Warner worked the night shift as a grocery stock boy while trying to break into the National Football League. He struggled for years before being picked-up as a backup quarterback. Then an injury to the starting quarterback gave Warner an opportunity to play and he led the hitherto hapless Saint Louis Rams to victory in the Super Bowl.

And as the crowd went wild and confetti fell from the stadium sky Warner was asked by a reporter, "First things first. Tell us about the pass (that won the game)." With a radiant smile Warner responded, "First things first: Glory to my Lord and Savior up above! Thank you, Jesus!"

Sean ("P-Diddy" "Puff-Daddy" "Puffy") Combs, rap star and multi-media mogul, was charged with weapons and bribery counts in connection to a shooting in which three people were injured. When a not-guilty verdict was returned applause erupted in the courtroom and his mother blew him a kiss. On the steps of the courthouse Combs said, "I just want to say I give all glory to God. I just feel blessed."

The stern minister/father in *A River Runs Through It* would have his sons study and recite *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* on Sunday afternoons before they could walk in the woods with him while he unwound between services. As the author puts it:

*But he never asked us more than the first question in the catechism, "What is the chief end of man?" And we answered together so one of us could carry on if the other forgot, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." This always seemed to satisfy him, as indeed such a beautiful answer should have...*

Dear friends, I want to think with you this morning about glory.

The idea that we give God glory is part of our cultural lexicon. It's common parlance. It rolls easily off the tongue and from the silly to the sublime I guess it seems appropriate ~ since no other created us and no other sustains us whatever glory there is should ultimately extend back to God. But....

But, is that what God wants or needs from us? Is "giving glory to God" shining back at God the affirmation and applause that is God's due? Is that what "glory" means? Is that what God wants? How would we glorify God? I want to think with you this morning about glory.

*I recognize that's scintillating stuff for a mediocre summer sermon...*

Glory surfaces repeatedly throughout the Gospel of John. In fact, 40 times in 21 chapters John uses some form of the word *doxa* ~ glory (from which we get doxology).

From the soaring prologue:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from God...*

To the wedding where Jesus turns the water into a miraculous merlot. John writes:

*This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

To this last prayer that Jesus offers just before he's arrested. The prayer starts:

*Father the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you...*

Glory is one of the thematic hooks on which John hangs his gospel.

So, what is glory?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for glory (*kavod*) comes from the word for "heavy." The word was first used to describe things that were heavy in the literal, physical sense. So, for example, when Eli falls off his chair and breaks his neck he's described as "heavy." The word was also used more figuratively to describe anything substantial or impressive. Abraham is described as "heavy," not because he needed to go on a diet, but because he was rich. Eventually the word was used to describe anyone who deserved honor or recognition: warriors, princes, judges, and others of influence and prestige.

In the New Testament glory means different things at different places. At times it refers to a high opinion or sense of respect for someone, but it also means the resplendent, luminous, presence of God. The incomparable wonder, mystery and majesty of God made manifest... God's "goodness" on display. And therefore, it is associated with dazzling light and shining clouds and that which is beyond comprehension. As Frederick Buechner puts it, "Glory is what God looks like when for the time being all you have to look at him with is a pair of eyes."

So, in some ways, glory is the combination of weight and honor and the expression of light. Glory is like a window that opens to the fullness of God. Therefore, for John, glory is realized in the incarnation ~ God in the flesh. And that glory is seen the clearest on the cross. The glory of God is in

the self-emptying,  
the downward mobility,  
the serving,  
and the suffering unto death of Jesus.

Now, that's a long way from bright lights, and heavenly thrones, and throwing touchdowns, but in the Gospel of John the locus of God's self-disclosure, the locus of God's glory, is the cross.

Which makes this line in our text all the more troubling.

At the end of his long-last-prayer Jesus prays not only for himself and for his disciples, but he prays for all who would follow him. Jesus prays for us.

He says:

*I give them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one...*

It is a beautiful and troubling line.

Jesus says that he has given us the same glory that God gave him.

Wait. What? That seems backward.

We're supposed to give Jesus the glory.

Jesus gives us the glory?

What does that mean?

Scott Hoezee puts it this way:

*The glory that the Father gave to the Son and that the Son gives to the Church is not the glory of klieg lights and media sizzle. It's the glory of the Word of God becoming meat, being made flesh, dwelling here in the mud and muck of this world. It's the glory of the One who came to serve and not be served. It's the glory of the One who was...lifted up off the earth not on some high throne but on a cross of wood.*

*That is the glory the Father gave the Son. That is the glory we display in the Church when we, like our Savior, serve quietly and humbly. As Debbie Blue put it, glory doesn't shine. It bleeds.*

We bear the glory of God when we embody love.

We bear the glory of God when we love and serve others.

We bear the glory of God when we follow the way of Jesus....

A surgeon named Richard Selzer tells of removing a tumor from the cheek of a young woman. After the surgery, the woman was in bed, her post-operative mouth twisted in a palsied, clownish way. A tiny twig of the facial nerve had been severed in the operation, releasing a muscle that led to her mouth. Her young husband was in the room along with the surgeon.

"Will my mouth always be like this?" the woman asked.

"Yes," the doctor replied, "the nerve was cut."

She nodded, fell silent, and looked broken.

But the young husband smiled gently and said, "I like it. It's kind of cute."

And all at once, Dr. Selzer said, I knew who this young husband was.

The doctor saw Jesus in the man. He saw Jesus in the man's gentleness and love, in his compassion and shared brokenness. And then he saw Jesus afresh as the husband bent down to kiss her crooked mouth, carefully twisting his own lips to accommodate her lips, showing her that their kiss still worked and always would. And glory infused that hospital room.

Dear friends, the glory of God is made manifest when we love and serve others.

When we lose our selves in service to others,  
when we show mercy, when we forgive,  
when we are in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized,  
when we are compassionate with the weak,  
when we serve the disabled,  
when we sit with the dying....

The glory that Jesus would give us is the same glory that God gave him ~ a cruciform glory. To a world that is bent toward power, to world that is enamored with beauty, to a world that is scrambling after self, God sent his Son to embody a different way. God sent his Son to manifest his glory on the cross. And the Son gives us that same glory. It is a beautiful and troubling line.

Dear friends, when our breath is taken away by beauty, when we are overwhelmed by grace, when light shines on us, let us liberally and lavishly give God glory. But let us also mark each day with the glory that God in Christ gives us.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way:

*Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.*

*Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.*

To the glory of God.

Amen.

*Note: I am indebted to an essay by Scott Hoezee for this take on this text. That same essay is the source of the Dr. Richard Selzer story.*