

Text: John 17: 1-5
Title: Concerning Glory
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There's an iconic scene in Monty Python's "The Meaning of Life." At a decidedly English all-boys boarding school the priest gets up to offer a prayer. The uniformed boys line the chancel; the robed priest begins, "Let us praise God." The boys then repeat every line as the priest prays:

Oh Lord, oooh you are so big, so absolutely huge. Gosh, we're all really impressed down here I can tell you. Forgive us, O Lord, for this our dreadful toadying and barefaced flattery, but you are so strong and, well, just so super. Fantastic. Amen.

Now, that borders on blaspheme, but I'm not sure that God is being mocked, rather the way in which prayer can become a pile of superlatives telling God how great God is – is being mocked. But, underneath the humor is the question about what God wants or requires.

Does God need our adoration and praise?

Does God want us to tell him that he is big or good or great?

Is God a giant ego in the sky requiring a reminder that he's totally awesome?

Is God looking for all the glory after a touchdown is scored or in an Oscar acceptance speech? "Giving God the glory" slips so easily into common-Christian-speak, but what does it really mean? Or, maybe better said: How do we glorify God? How is glorifying God rightly understood?

And, why that question this morning? Well...

We overhear Jesus praying in our text. It is an intimate unvarnished glimpse into the relationship between God and Jesus – father and son. And, the first thing from Jesus lips, in this his last prayer, is the request to be glorified. The second to last request in the same prayer has to do with glory, and some form of the word "glory" shows up nine times in that prayer.

And, that's not an aberration. "Glory" or "glorify" appear forty-two times in the twenty-one chapters of the Gospel of John. In our text this morning Jesus prays:

Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you... I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world began.

That's a lot of glory....

Glory is slippery and not easily defined. The Hebrew words that get translated as glory have the sense of weight or heaviness, and from that honor or importance. The Greek root for glory is *doxa* – from which we get doxology. It suggests a "judgment or opinion" and by extension "good reputation or honor."

So, to glorify someone is to report on their character or their attributes. It is not simply thanksgiving in response to some act or gift. It has more to do with naming and honoring a weighty quality or essential nature in the other.

John Piper puts it this way:

You can magnify with a microscope or with a telescope. A microscope magnifies by making tiny things look bigger than they are. A telescope magnifies by making gigantic things (like stars), which look tiny, appear more as they really are. God created the universe to magnify His glory the way a telescope magnifies stars. Everything He does in our salvation is designed to magnify the glory of His grace like this.

To glorify is to magnify – like a telescope.

To glorify is to hold up a mirror or shine a light.

To glorify is to celebrate what is.

So, does God need us to glorify him?

Is it our function to name for God who God is?

Jesus asks God to glorify him in order that he might in turn glorify God and he links it to obedience. In essence Jesus says, “I glorified you by doing what you wanted me to do, by teaching what you wanted me to teach, by being who you wanted me to be. I glorified you by healing the sick, freeing the prisoner, and imaging your way in the world. I glorified you by doing the work that you gave me to do.”

And, in John’s Gospel the completion of that work is the cross – a mysterious and grotesque glory. But, the culmination of Jesus glorifying God is the crucifixion.

So, Jesus prays,

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do....

And hours later he breathes his last with the same word, “It is finished.”

Jesus is glorified by being who he is – even unto death on the cross.

God is glorified by Jesus being who he is – even unto death on the cross.

And all of that is to say that giving God glory has something to do with the fulfillment of our rightful role and responsibility in the created order. To glorify God, is in part, a function of obedience to the way and will of God.

In the 1924 Olympics Eric Liddell, a Scottish Christian, was scheduled to race against Harold Abrahams, an English Jew, in the 100 meters. Liddell refused to run in a Sunday qualifying heat because it violated his understanding of keeping Sabbath. These characters and this conflict are captured in the movie “Chariots of Fire.”

(“Chariots of Fire” and a Monty Python reference? Children ask your parents about these ancient artifacts....)

The way the movie frames the story, Liddell runs for the glory of God and Abrahams runs to overcome anti-Semitism. In one iconic scene Liddell misses a prayer meeting because of his

running; his sister upbraids him and accuses him of no longer caring about God. Liddell tells her that though he intends to eventually return to China as a missionary, he feels divinely inspired when running, and that not to run would be to dishonor God. He says:

I believe that God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast, and when I run I feel his pleasure.

Dear friends, it seems to me that in being who we are created to be we glorify God. That is not to exclude telling God in song or prayer how great God is, but it is to recognize that when we pursue God's intention for creation we magnify God. When we are obedient to God's way and will, when we are rightly who we were created to be we glorify God....

As singers and scientists, as athletes and astronauts, as bakers and bookworms, golfers and garbage men, as parents and children, as neighbors and friends we glorify God. We were created to run and study and laugh and make love and explore and build and serve and sleep and... and when we do so, we glorify God.

Irenaeus, a second century church father, is credited with writing something akin to "The glory of God is a human being who is fully alive." There is more going on in the original text, but that line has come to mean that when we are fully human – rightfully or obediently taking up our calling – God is glorified. God is glorified in all of our beauty and brokenness, in the abundance of our joys and sorrows, in our finest moments and in our flaws, in a human being who is fully alive....

Clay Brouwer and Addie Larsen are graduating in the next few weeks. I'm sure this is not how they envisioned their last few months of high school and we miss celebrating this passage with them – we'd like to magnify their accomplishments. But, I'm also reminded that the glory of God is expressed in them living into their unique gifts and callings. God is magnified by who they are and how they might use their gifts for the good others and the *shalom* of creation. They can "give God the glory" but we see it in them – we see the glory of God in their full humanity. Thanks be to God.

Rick Warren, mega-church pastor and winsome-goofy-guy-for-Jesus, made a big splash with his book, "The Purpose Driven Life." It sold over 30 million copies and just imagine the sales of coffee mugs, t-shirts, and movie rights! The book opens with a great line, "It is not about you." But, later on Warren writes this:

It is all for him. The ultimate goal of the universe is to show the glory of God. It is the reason for everything that exists, including you. God made it all for his glory. Without God's glory there would be nothing. What is the glory of God? It is who God is. It is the essence of his nature, the weight of his importance, the demonstration of his power, and the atmosphere of his presence...

We stand in a long tradition that recognizes creation as the theater of God's glory and that the intention of, and ultimately the consummation of, creation is for God's glory. And, everything in the middle is for God's glory. You were created for God's glory.

Whatever is bent, marred, or deviates from God's glory is sin. But, even that will ultimately be redeemed by the work of Christ for God's glory!

And, our place and purpose is to magnify God – in obedience, in being fully alive. As question and answer number one of the Westminster Shorter Catechism has it:

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

So, dear friends, I am not sure that God needs us to go on and on about how great he is, but we were created for obedience, and in obedience – glory.

So, in our singing and our praying may God be glorified. In our work and our leisure, in tending after our pets, in loving our parents, in serving as Elders and Deacons, in raising children and raising a glass may God be glorified. In all that we do, in all that we are, may God be glorified. For all glory begins and ends in God.

Amen.