

Lent 5(B) - The Hour of Glory

When I mention “glory” I wonder what’s the first thing that comes to mind? Maybe it makes you think of a beautiful landscape just as the sun breaks through the clouds and floods the view with bright light. Or maybe it’s a proud moment when you or someone you love has accomplished something tremendous and is acknowledged for it. Or maybe it’s simply an impression of splendour and brightness and triumph. All of these ideas can fit into that one English word “glory”. And it’s not all that different for the original Greek word δόξα which is translated as “glory”. It brings with it the same kinds of images. And this word is very important to John in his account of the Gospel. He uses the word “glory” a lot, and most especially in the reading we just heard...this word is used four times in just a very short passage. So I want to have a think today about what exactly it is that John means when he talks about glory.

So first let’s talk about where we are right now as Christians in our journey with Jesus through Lent. We have reached the fifth Sunday of Lent, and this is the point when the narrative starts to intensify as we move into these last two weeks before Easter. There is a name for this bit of Lent...it’s called “Passiontide” and this Sunday is sometimes called Passion Sunday. It’s now that we start that final journey with Jesus and the disciples into Jerusalem...the journey that ends at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. And to start this final journey today, we have this passage from John in which Jesus says that his hour has finally come. Now this idea of Jesus’ hour is also very important in John...and you’ll notice that we’ve heard it before. At Epiphany when Jesus started his public ministry and attended the wedding feast at Cana, he said to his mother that his hour had not yet come. And this happens a couple more times in John, in Chapters 7 and 8, when things are about to come to a head with the authorities but Jesus avoids arrest because, as John says, “his hour had not yet come.”

It's not until Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with his disciples to celebrate Passover that the narrative changes and John announces that Jesus' hour has finally come. So we have this passage from Chapter 12 when some Greeks are seeking him out, and then again in the next chapter when he washes the disciples' feet, and finally at the end of the four chapters 14-17 that make up what is often called the Farewell Discourse because it's the last long address that Jesus gives his followers. Each time John says Jesus knows his hour has come, and in Chapter 17 just before his arrest, Jesus starts to pray by saying, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you..." This is the moment that John has been pointing to and hinting at all along, and for John "the hour" that Jesus speaks of is the moment when he will be glorified, and the moment he is glorified is when he is lifted up from the earth...when he is put to death on the cross.

And that is supposed to be shocking. It's supposed to bring our brains to a screeching halt. John has made it clear from the very beginning that Jesus is the Son of God...remember the prologue "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" He's not being somewhat mysterious like Mark or making other connections as well like Matthew and Luke, John is saying without beating around the bush, that the person he's writing about is God Incarnate, and that as he goes about among us, he is moving toward the hour when he will be glorified. And as he approaches Jerusalem and is greeted, as we will remember next Sunday, with palms and Hosannas, his hour is finally here. And as he celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples and talks about all of us being caught up in his relationship with the Father, he says the time has come for him to be glorified. And the moment we see him glorified...he is suffering and dying in humiliation. It makes no sense.

If we were to pick a moment of glory in John's Gospel, there are lots of moments that make more sense to us. The heavens opening when Jesus is

baptised by his cousin John, the unbelievable miracles in front of crowds of followers, the moment when Jesus is transfigured on the mountaintop. What better picture of glory could you find than the blinding light and the voice from heaven saying “This is my Son”? But that’s not God’s idea of glory. We think of glory as something overwhelming, awe-inspiring, maybe even hard to look at. Moses spoke to God face-to-face, and when he returned to the people his face shone so brightly that he had to cover it so the people could look at him. Glory can shine so brightly, that we have to avert our eyes, like looking straight at the sun. But there’s something else that’s hard to look at, and that’s suffering. Injustice and pain and agony, those are hard to look at and they make us want to turn away. When Isaiah talks about the coming Messiah in Chp 53 he says he will be “a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces”

But God doesn’t look away...this is key. Jesus headed for Jerusalem knowing what was waiting for him there, knowing that he was heading for the cross, and he did not turn around. He looks at all of the suffering and injustice and despair in this world and does not look away. Instead, he embraces it, he takes on our suffering and our death and transforms it into glory. When he is lifted up on the cross, he draws all people to himself...that is our redemption, that is what gives us hope. To quote my former boss Dean David, “The cross is the whole Gospel. The cross is the life of God as it is lived among us. The cross is what perfect humanity looks like.”

That is why the cross is the hour when Jesus is glorified, because it is the moment when God’s love is shown most perfectly to the whole world. It is the moment when God showed us that there is nothing that can separate us from that love, nothing that will make God look away from us. And that is our greatest comfort, that no matter where we are or what we’re going through right now...no matter what private agony we hide from the world or what has us weighed down...we are seen, we are

known, we are understood. The cross is proof that God will never abandon us, and for that we glorify him and we give him thanks and praise.