

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the day in the liturgical year that we celebrate the majesty and mystery of the Triune God we gather around each week to worship and glorify. In our midst today, almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has come to us in Word and in Sacrament. We gather because we understand that God is not an idea, God is not a philosophy, but rather, God is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ and remains with us, loving us, forgiving us and guiding us by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, or as the Spirit who is an advocate for us working right now in this gathering through the very Word and Sacraments that centers us in this worship. While we celebrate the majesty and mystery of God in the controversy and complexity of three persons this day, may we know with all our hearts and souls and without a doubt that God knows us and loves us and wants to be known and loved by us.

As I begin this sermon, there is something that I would like for us to understand about this Gospel lesson before us today...and that is that we are still listening to the conversation Jesus has with his disciples that we heard about on Maundy Thursday when Jesus gets up from the table of the last supper with the disciples and washes their feet. This conversation Jesus has with the disciples on this night is known as his Farwell Discourse and High Priestly Prayer that consists of five chapters in John's Gospel. And in this conversation, we hear Jesus attempting to explain to the disciples that he is the very presence of God and that he is returning to God the Father...and he is attempting to explain that this must take place in order for us all to return to the Father along with Jesus and through Jesus.

A couple of weeks back, in a sermon during our Eastertide, I mentioned a word that is used by John within this discourse that may help us understand the presence of God with us. The term I am referring to is glory. This term "glory" in this Gospel of John is NOT defined as we normally understand this term to be. It is NOT high renown or honor won by notable achievements, it not defined in this Gospel as magnificence or great beauty or a thing that is beautiful or distinctive. John uses the term *δόξα (doxa)* "glory" to mean the manifestation of God, or the revealed presence of God, or even God Himself.

In the prayer at the end of this discourse we hear this term glory being used but we also hear Jesus explaining the triune nature of God with us and what that means for us. In the Words of Jesus to God in prayer we hear this:

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, (John 17:22)

Jesus continues to pray:

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

God, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has given us this very glory, this very presence of God in the faith we hold in our hearts, and we hear Jesus telling us this very thing today in our Gospel lesson:

¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14)

All that is Jesus will be declared to us...what belongs to Jesus will be declared to us. God's *glory* is declared to us! What do you suppose that means for us as Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ? What do we get from Jesus in this declaration?

First, I want to make clear what we do *NOT* get. We do NOT get high renown or honor. We do NOT win any recognition for notable or significant achievements. Nor are we recognized as magnificent or distinctive. We are and continue to be forgiven sinners who live in the grace given to us through our faith.

What we are given is the promise of new life and through our faith we too become the glory of God, the very presence of God when that grace and love of God is shared as freely as it has been declared to each of us. But along with that "glory," that presence we are also given the opportunity to suffer for others as Jesus suffered for us...maybe not such a good deal after all. Nonetheless, we stand in the grace and peace in the glory or presence that has been declared to us. St. Paul reminds us today that as we stand boldly in that glory of God, may we then instead of feeling betrayed by God in our sufferings and challenges, may:

we [then] boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:3b-5)

In this, Jesus NOT only declares to us God's glory or God's presence with us, but he also reminds us of the deeply personal reconciliation we share in between God our Father and the human race through Jesus Christ. Listen again to the prayer of Jesus:

that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, (John 17:21-22)

...the glory that you have given me I have given them... Are we willing to give that same glory to others? This is the heart of who we are as Christians, we are the presence of God's grace, mercy, and love...NOT just for ourselves but for others. But unfortunately, it seems too often to be the case that our knowledge and love of God are but a reflex to an idol of our own imagination of a god that is judgmental and hateful. It then becomes vital to our understanding of this glory, this presence within our faith to keep the suffering of Jesus or the cross and resurrection at the center of our understanding...an understanding of giving of one's self...and to constantly invoke the Holy Spirit through whom God's love fills our hearts and our souls...NOT God's wrath...but God's love.¹ In other words, too often we follow the god of our own imagination and ego that we believe empowers us to ignore or even revenge the cross of Christ and become the enforcer of God's revenge or wrath on those whom we judge unworthy.

Luther said it this way:

Thus – provided that we have begun to believe in God – God can also condone our ignorance for finding something in ourselves by which to come to the Father without

¹ Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume X, The Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, The Letter to the Romans, The First Letter to the Corinthians.* Romans 5:6-11, Reflections, par 1, page 521.

Christ, and for viewing God merely as our own imagination portrays Him, namely, that God looks with favor on our own worthiness and zeal, or on our good intentions, and shows mercy for this reason.²

To be clear, this declaration of God's glory or God's presence that is declared to each of us through our faith in Jesus Christ DOES NOT make us "A" Christian, rather it makes us Christian. "A" Christian is a construct or a formula, or a noun, and this is NOT what Jesus is declaring to us. We are Christian, not a construct or a formula, or a noun but a verb...an action or an occurrence of love and grace. We are not an idol of our own making; we are followers being led into faithfully living out the grace, mercy, and love we have become through our faith by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Before us in our daily living and in our worship at this moment is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth that is the constant unfolding of God's promises, NOT given just to me, but given to each of us, to be shared with all. In this glory that guides us and has gathered us, we are fed, nurtured, and sent into the world and guided by the peace of the Spirit of truth that Christ has given us. We are NOT and I pray that we are NOT led by what we assume about God and God's grace and mercy.

But then we may ask, how then do we know we are following the Spirit of truth that Christ says will guide us? Saint Paul in his letter to the church in Rome advises us this way concerning the authenticity of the guidance of the Spirit of Truth:

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

St Paul adds this a little later in the next chapter of this letter:

^{14:1} Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. (Romans 14:1)

^{15:7} Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

(Romans 15:7-9)

Saint Augustine would say this about being guided by the Spirit:

"Whoever, therefore, thinks that [they] understand the divine Scriptures, or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand [scripture] at all."³

² Pelikan, Jaroslav, Editor, Daniel E. Poellot, Assistant Editor. *Luther's Works Volume 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957. Page 57-58.

³ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Translated by D. W. Robertson, Jr., Macmillan / Library of Liberal Arts, Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1958. Book I, XXVI, page 30.

If our interpretation of scripture does not result in love of God and love of neighbor, then we have not understood scripture and we are merely following our own egos and idols. Augustine is reminding us that *love* is our primary understanding, or love is the lens in which we interpret Holy Scripture as well as the way in which we discern the direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Since our Gospel lessons have been in the context of that evening when Jesus gets up from the table and washes the disciples' feet, I go back to his very words to them as a guide for us into the truth today as we discern the work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. Jesus says this after he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table:

“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:12-17)

Jesus proclaims to us today that he will take what is His and declare it to us. In that gift to each of us will be the *glory* or the presence of God, but also what is given to us is a reminder of the challenge to our faith, the struggle with our faith, and the trauma and the heartache of discovering that the “glory” of that faith is not what we make of it for our own benefit, rather faith and the glory or the very presence of God is what comes from the very challenge to our faith. Not by our own understanding or strength do we come to this faith or to the glory of the presence of God within us, it is a gift freely given to each of us. Come now to this Holy Meal so that this faith within us can be nurtured and realized. And like the bread that is broken and handed to us, may we become food for any in need so that God's glory, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.