

May 13, 2018
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Mother's Day
1 Peter 5:6-11; John 17:1-3
When the Time Comes
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After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. *Words from God for the people of God. Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our rock the source of our very lives – we pray in Christ's name, amen.*

One of the things about being a preacher is that as the years go by, you begin to accumulate quite a few sermons. Every now and then I will look at a sermon I preached 10 or 20 years ago and I am transported back to the very week I wrote that particular sermon. This week, I looked back at a sermon I preached on Mother's Day, 2005. Janet and I were still right smack in the middle of rearing our children – Carl who was then 12, and Grace who was 10.

I shared then that, although at the time they were growing more independent every day, they still looked to us for advice and guidance. They still needed to think of us as being somewhat all knowing – of having all the answers to their questions. But I then added that the time would come one day when Janet and I would only receive intermittent phone calls from our children seeking counsel, or help, or money as they otherwise worked their own way through a life.

That projected future is now here. Of course, with technology being the way it is we don't just get phone calls but updates on our children's lives through Facebook, Instagram, Fitbit, a blog that was started by Carl when he began his hike on the Appalachian Trail, the 360 app and texts. I know way more about what my grown children are up to than my parents ever did about me when I was their age.

But the fact remains: Our children live in Tennessee and are no longer the center of our day to day lives – just a part of it. Our most important duty has been to work ourselves out of a job. Our baby girl is now about to graduate from college. Her future is no longer in our hands.

Entrusting her and her brother's destiny to God without our constant involvement, as is the case with every parent, requires trust, love, humility and sacrifice – all of which are exactly what Jesus does with *his* children – his disciples – as he approaches the cross.

Our text this morning covers part of what is known as "the high priestly prayer" of Jesus. In it, Jesus prepares to entrust *himself* to *his* divine destiny and his disciples to the Holy Spirit. Only, his disciples are not about to leave *him*; *he* is about to leave *them* as he faces his date with destiny on the cross. And Jesus is confident at this point, that his heavenly parent will care for and protect his flock in their ministry, as did Jesus while he was with them.

In the prayer Jesus gives thanks to God his father for the fulfilment of his mission and ministry, having accomplished the goal for which he was sent –to be glorified. That’s right – glorified.

Glorification – it’s what all of us want for our children isn’t it? We all want everyone to see the glory in our children the way we do.

And to have *Jesus* glorified – that was God’s whole purpose in sending him. Did you realize that? At least that’s what John says. To be glorified.

But wait a minute that just doesn’t sound right does it?

Because when I think of a parent glorifying her child, I think of the stereotypical obnoxious helicopter mother who demands that their little angel get the treatment he or she deserves because, of course, he or she is exceptional and you are an idiot if you can’t see that.

Yes, to be glorified in our culture...

Means to be idolized.

It means to be the exception.

It means to be counted by everyone around you as very important – a VIP.

It means to be made famous and if not famous then infamous will do.

But is this what Jesus means? Where is Jesus headed as he prays this prayer? It is the very last week of his life. Where is he headed? He is headed to the cross. What Jesus means by glorification is not what we mean; in fact it is the exact opposite.

Of course, the crowds want to glorify Jesus in the way we humans *tend* to glorify our leaders these days which is as the exception to the rules by which the rest of humanity are bound. After all, Jesus is their man – the one who put the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees in their place – the one who is not afraid to speak truth to Roman power. Power to the people!

Jesus has addressed the deepest fears and longings of the masses. He *is* understood by them clearly as their longed for savior – the one who has come to overturn established religion and government. He *will* put those who have suffered at the hands of the self-proclaimed righteous and a callous government on top. He will crush those who stand in his way.

In this way, the people’s attempt at the glorification of Jesus is no different than Germany’s glorification of Hitler or, I dare say, sadly, today’s evangelical Christian leader’s glorification of Donald Trump. It is a glorification based not in love of God but in fear of being completely edged out of a share of the power. Don’t get me wrong. When the establishment has grown as corrupt as it was in the day of Jesus as well as it is today, we need leaders who will thumb their nose at that establishment.

But what we don’t need are leaders who manipulate our fears by making *some* of us feel more powerful at the expense of the *rest* of us and at the expense of the Truth. What we don’t need are those who invite us to be less responsible by helping us believe that we and our people are the

chosen, while the rest of the world is filled with nothing but evil enemies who we need to defend against or better yet, wipe out.

Yet these are the very leaders we tend to glorify. It is the type of leader the people thought Jesus was. It is evidently the type of person many evangelicals still think Jesus is today. They could not have been more mistaken then. They could not be more mistaken now.

Jesus will have nothing of the kind. His glorification will come not in his power but in his weakness, not by playing on humanity's deepest fears but by attempting to transform their fear into love through serving up himself on a cross. The glorification that Jesus is talking about is his willingness to give everything to be who he is – not what a fearful people want him to be. And who he is, is the ultimate sacrificer for the sake of love – love of God and love of others. Jesus was and is a bridge *builder* not a bridge *bomber*.

No, the glory that Jesus seeks from his heavenly Father does not resemble the glory with which we are the most familiar. The glory we are used to *inflates egos*, *encourages favoritism*, *scapegoats the marginalized*, and *bestows privilege, wealth, and popular esteem to some groups over others by virtue of race, socio-economic class, and sexual orientation*.

Thus our glorification of divisive politicians and the filthy rich, along with music idols, athletes and actors grossly exceeds the positive effect of their abilities and talents on the human race. More than anything, it is an indictment of us, for it is an indication that deep down we believe that one's existence cannot be justified unless one has nothing to fear and either becomes powerful, wealthy or a superstar or hitches one's wagon to such a one.

Why do we participate in this kind of glorification? Because we have observed that reaching such a state of glorification means that one no longer has to be responsible to and for others like everyone else. And since the American tenet that we all buy into is that anyone can reach that point of glorification – fame – wealth – power – if one just works hard enough, we glorify those who have reached it; we excuse them from behaviors we wouldn't put up with from our closest relations. We assume there must be something special about them that sets them apart.

Of course, in some rare cases this may be true. But in the vast majority, it isn't true at all. In fact, the very thing that drives one to be glorified in the first place is at bottom an attempt to opt out of being a morally responsible, civic minded, compassionate human being. Hence we have this warped circumstance in our country when people like the Kardashians are famous for being famous – no real talent and certainly no real redeeming human qualities; and we have reality TV where people will literally do *any* and *everything* imaginable to be famous – if only for a moment.

The glory we bestow on people today compared to what they add to the genuine spread of love and healing and wholeness in this world could not be more undeserved.

Maybe you think I am being too harsh. So I ask you – do you recognize any of these names: Owen D. Young, Pierre Laval, Hugh S. Johnson, James F. Byrnes, Mohammed Mossadegh, Harlow Curtis? Apparently you should, because these are all people who were once designated as "Person of the Year" by *Time* magazine, indicating they had the greatest impact in that year of all persons living on Earth.

The celebrity of today is all but forgotten tomorrow. So much for the kind of glory we tend to bestow.

In contrast, today Jesus shows us what real glory from a divine point of view is all about. The glory he seeks will be found in his claiming his destiny as the self-sacrificing servant of Isaiah on behalf of his flock.

Divine glorification has to do, not with a striving for a personal stone on the walk of fame of history at all costs under the guise of being a leader *for* the people (like, say, a Hillary Clinton), but with finding that slender thread of God that is related authentically to you and following that thread with both passion and great fear and trembling – because being real, being authentic, being genuinely and uniquely who you are, striving towards being the one God intended, has nothing to do with power, fame and recognition; to the contrary, following God’s unique claim on one always puts one at odds with the herd’s idea of glory and fame.

It is a paradox that the experience of ultimate belonging - completely to your maker and completely to yourself - means that you often have trouble like fitting in.

Brenet Brown’s new book is called “Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone.” In it she says that she has concluded from her research that every single one of us know the distinct difference between belonging and fitting in. In fact, Brown is so confident of this that she says she can go into any middle school in the country and pick out any kid at random and be absolutely confident that they can tell her the difference.

Fitting in means completely giving up who you are in order to be deemed acceptable by another. Belonging is being accepted for who you authentically and uniquely already are.

It is for that reason that many of us either spend our lives lonely and apart to protect who we are, or we spend it with others but are miserable because the price has been to be someone we are not in order to fit in. But, of course, there is a third way – the way of Christ the way of knowing we belong to something higher.

M. Scott Peck was known in the 90’s and early 2000’s as a great ‘Christian’ Psychologist. Yet many do not know that Peck was not a Christian when he wrote his first and most highly acclaimed book, “The Road Less Traveled.” Of course, he eventually did become a Christian; and this is how he describes a part of that process: He writes, “One of the inner events of my journey occurred around age 30 when I read C.S. Lewis’ The ‘Screwtape Letters’, a novel composed of letters of advice from Screwtape, a senior demon, to his nephew, Wormwood, whose task is to undermine the spiritual life of a young man. At one point, Screwtape advises Wormwood to make sure that the man, now a young Christian due to their combined bungling, to regard “his time as his time.”

Well, “This sentence,” admits Peck, “made no sense to me. I read it three times. I wondered whether there might not be some typographical error. How else could anybody think of his time except as his own? Then it dawned on me that the possibility existed of my time belonging to a power higher than myself. For a good while, it was a most discomfoting notion, and still today I am continuing to learn that my time belongs to God. It wasn’t until a dozen years later, however,

that I actually submitted to being baptized as a Christian.” M. Scott Peck, *Further Along the Road Less Traveled: The Unending Journey Toward Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 157.

Our passage on glorification from John is linked in today’s lectionary with the words of the writer of 1 Peter: “Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, so” What?! “so that *God* may exalt you in due time.”

Being glorified by God involves humbling ourselves. It involves recognizing that our time belongs to God, it involves therefore being real, being willing to be a misfit, being willing to sacrifice and leaving our being lifted up to God. Although, we don’t sacrifice in order to be exalted, *when* we sacrifice out of our commitment to who we are in the light of God’s love and our love for each other, we *are* exalted.

And what does that look like? It looks like we have something real that others are drawn to. When we belong to ourselves through the Christ that is in us, there is something decidedly winsome, decidedly genuine, decidedly unique, decidedly familiar, decidedly vulnerable and decidedly strong all at the same time.

As Brenet Brown reminds us, belonging to something higher inside of one and honoring that above all else will inevitably push one out into the wilderness; however, once there, one discovers one is not alone. One discovers others like oneself for whom belonging to one’s unique inner calling was too important to settle for just fitting in.

The odd paradox is that only those who are willing to risk not fitting in finally know what it is to truly belong. I think I remember Jesus saying something about this: only those willing to lose their lives will be the ones to find it?

We live in a world where people are, on the contrary, clinging to life – a world where publicity takes the place of truth. The temptation of self-glorification is ever-present, crouching at the door.

Perhaps no act has a tendency to short-circuit this tendency more than having children. There are few endeavors of which I am aware that, if carried out properly, do more to create the climate of self-sacrifice than that of being a parent in general and being a mother in particular. Because it is impossible to raise healthy-minded, whole-hearted children without genuine sacrifice – and all so that one day they will leave you and be on their own.

Real parenthood, real motherhood, then is good practice for the kind of glorification that Christ is talking about – for it involves sacrificing self-glorification in favor of the glorification of another. As parents we are glad to sacrifice. We consider it a blessing to have things to give to our children to bring glory to their lives. But Jesus invites us to have that attitude more generally about God.

In 1960 two wealthy Presbyterians, a lawyer and a merchant traveled with a group that was headed to Korea to help out with a newly established church there. As they arrived, they saw by the side of the road, a field in which a boy was pulling a crude plow and an old man held the plow handles and guided it.

The lawyer was amused and took a snapshot of the scene. He turned to the missionary, who served as their interpreter and guide, and he said, "That's a curious picture. I suppose they are very poor."

The guide replied, "Yes, that is the family of Chi Noue. When the place of worship was being built, they were eager to give something to it, but they had no money, so they sold their only ox and gave the money to the church. This spring, they are pulling the plow themselves."

The men were silent for several moments. Then the businessman replied, "That must have been a real sacrifice." The guide said, "They do not call it that. They thought it was a blessing that they had an ox to sell."

That's the kind of Glory Jesus is talking about – when willing sacrifice is experienced as a blessing for we know we already belong to the kingdom. Let us pray.

Gracious God, help us to know that we belong to the one who guides us to who we truly are, the Christ so that we may willingly follow him to the cross, sacrificing for your glorification and not ours that others may experience your love and enter the kingdom we enjoy.

And now bless these gifts that they help us extend your hospitality to those who feel like they neither fit in nor belong anywhere that they may know they belong with you. In Christ's name we pray, Amen