

Glory Redefined

John 2:1-11, Philippians 2:5-11

First Presbyterian Church

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Opening Words

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Introduction to Gospel Reading

Sometimes in life things happen that change our perspective... that make us update long-held ideas and definitions. There's a scene from the movie *A Beautiful Mind* in which John Nash, the very socially awkward, but crazy smart mathematician played by Russell Crowe, awkwardly proposes marriage to his girlfriend as if it were an algebraic equation: "Does our relationship warrant long-term commitment?" In response his wife-to-be says, "Just give me a moment to revise my girlhood notions of romance." Sometimes things happen in life that cause us to update long-held definitions... and I want to suggest that this will be happening throughout this sermon series in the way John's Gospel defines "glory" – we're going to have to revise our definition of "glory."

Bible Reading – John 2:1-11

²On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ³Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ⁴When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁵And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁶His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁷Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁸Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁹He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So, they took it. ¹⁰When the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹¹and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹²Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Sermon¹

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee,
and revealed his glory...

To tell you the honest truth, I've never been crazy about the word, "glory." I'm not exactly sure why that is... maybe it's because it seems like such an old word that doesn't get used much anymore. Or maybe it's because it seems so disconnected from my daily life – it's not that I have NEVER experienced glory... just not all that often. I mean, when I think of "glory" I think of the bright shining presence of God... the white-hot holiness of the Almighty that is so stunning, even Moses had to be hidden in the cleft of a rock to keep it from burning him to a crisp. "Glory" is the power of God SO raw and SO real that the priests who entered the Holy of Holies were never completely sure they would come out alive. And even on a human level, when we talk about "glory," we think of things that are really dramatic, things that raise someone up to such a pinnacle of splendor that they elicit the adoration and praise of everyone else. This is certainly true in the Bible. In Hebrew *kabod* is "glory" and it means something with gravity, something heavy, something weighty in the sense of being momentous. And in Greek, the word *doxa* is translated "glory" which is the reason why we sing our "doxology" – we sing praises at the top of our lungs because we have been exposed to something stunning... something spectacular... something loaded with heavenly majesty and power. Glory is big. Glory is bright. Glory is loud. Glory overwhelms. You can't miss glory. At least that's what I thought.

I mentioned earlier that glory is a key theme in John's gospel – beginning in the first chapter and continuing to the last.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son..." 1:14

"Those who speak on their own seek their own glory;
but the one who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is true..." 7:18

"Yet I do not seek my own glory..."
If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.
It is my Father who glorifies me..." 8:50, 54

"I want them . . . to see my glory,
the glory you have given me because you loved me . . ." 17:24

Glory is a key theme in John's Gospel and there's lots of glory in there, but here's the thing... here's the interesting, and I think important thing – John waits to mention Jesus' "glory" until *after* he has put on his flesh... until after he has become like us.

¹ Resources used for this sermon include Scott Hoezee's reflections for Epiphany 2 C for the Center for Excellence in Preaching: https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-2c-3/?type=the_lectionary_gospel January 11, 2016 and January 14, 2019.

You remember John begins his Gospel by taking us back to the very beginning... before recorded history, even before creation... to reveal the eternal Word of God... the One who was with God and was God... the One through whom all things would be created. Talk about glory! Right? But John doesn't tie Jesus' glory to that... he ties it to the Word putting on flesh and living among us, full of grace and truth. And what that means... is that for him... Jesus' glory is not in the soaring words about the pre-existent, eternal Word of God. No, glory came only AFTER this One who was with God and was God became flesh and lived among us. It reminds us of Paul's beautiful hymn in Philippians 2 that we began our worship with... where Paul talks about the glorification of Christ only AFTER he has "emptied himself, being born in human likeness" ... only AFTER he has humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." Only THEN was he "glorified" and given the name that is above all names.

So, what does all this talk about glory have to do with a wedding reception in a little town called Cana? Well, you may know the story: how in those days wedding receptions were rather lengthy affairs – often lasting for days – and how for this particular reception either the people were exceedingly thirsty, or the bridal party goofed with the wine order. Regardless, the wine ran out... and though the guests were pretty loaded already, they needed more wine to keep things going. So, Jesus' mother, keenly aware that a social and religious catastrophe was about to happen... Jesus's mother corners him into doing something about it. Somehow, he transforms six huge jars of purification water into the finest vintage anyone had ever tasted... which, you have to admit, is a pretty neat trick. Maybe not on the level of raising Lazarus from the dead, but still... a fine miracle... so that John writes that after Jesus turns water into wine, the disciples beheld Jesus' "glory" and they put their faith in him.

We thought glory is big. Glory is bright. Glory is loud. Glory overwhelms. But John... in chapter 2, vs. 11... tells us otherwise. Imagine you were looking down on this wedding banquet from above. Would you see anything you would call "glorious"? You'd see folks eating and drinking, laughing, and dancing... but never once would you see any bright shining lights... any sounds of visible power... any hint of divine presence that would cause people to fall back in awe and wonder.

So where was the "glory" in all this? Well, it was right there, as it turns out, in this quiet man who initially didn't want to get involved... and yet, once he DID get involved did so very quietly...very subtly. You know, there is no evidence that anyone other than his mother and disciples and a few servants ever knew what had happened... not even the wine steward knew! Yet this was a glory revelation... it was about his glory shining through. And apparently it was enough glory to generate faith in the hearts of the disciples. Somehow that day they discerned Jesus to be Messiah... the One who would bring abundance where there had once been only scarcity. Somehow, they saw in this quiet miracle in Cana an echo of all those soaring prophecies about how when the kingdom fully comes, all the good things we enjoy would flow freely in never-ending abundance... and that abundance is a sign of the glory of God.

So, there it is: glory can be big and bright and loud and overwhelming... and glory can be small and silent and ever-so-mundane. The glory of God can be luminous and blinding and splendid and majestic in ways that send us falling down upon our faces in humble adoration. But glory can also come through the grace and truth of the very humble incarnate Lord Jesus... when one day he gave hope to the poor, and on another day, he forgave the sins of the downtrodden... when he reached out to his enemies in love and displayed grace to the least deserving... when he stripped down to his underwear and washed their dirty feet and when he prayed for them. It's the glory of One who came to serve rather than be served. It's the glory of One who... as Jesus will say to Nicodemus next Sunday... One who was lifted up off the earth, not on some high and mighty throne... but on a cross of wood.

And if there is anything to this line of thought, my friends, then it is very good news. Because it means we don't have to wait for special seasons of blessing to see glory. We don't need angels' wings or skies split apart. We don't need to be transported out of the routines of our daily lives to be encountered by glory. Nor do we need to be lifted out of our sufferings and our sorrows and our hardships to see glory. In fact, it may be that those are the very places where we can expect to see glory more often than not.

Richard Selzer is a surgeon who one day was called upon to remove a tumor from the cheek of a young woman. After the surgery, the woman was back in her bed, her postoperative mouth twisted in an awkward way. Turns out 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 there in the room 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, "You know, I like it. I think it's kind of cute." And all at once, Dr. Selzer *knew* who this young husband was... and the doctor saw Jesus in the man. He saw Jesus in the man's gentleness and love, in his sympathy and brokenness. And then he saw Jesus afresh as the kind 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. Dr. Selzer knew that glory infused that hospital room that day—the glory of God's One and Only who came here, humbly accommodating himself to us in our brokenness by taking on the very nature of a servant. We have seen his glory. We still see his glory. It is all around us. And this is the glory you and I can display when we, like our Savior, serve quietly and humbly in love.