

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Easter 7

Collect:

O King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus with great triumph to you kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Acts 1:6-14      Psalm 68:1-10. 33-36    1Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

### **John 17:1-11**

In writing and reading may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

On Thursday we celebrated the Ascension, which I described as the fulfilment of Easter. It's a day when the liturgy and the hymns focus on Jesus' glory and majesty as he returns to the Father. Today our gospel has the theme of "glorification" running all the way through it, so on this Sunday after Ascension we have an opportunity to reflect on what we mean by Jesus' glory and what in turn it might mean for us to glorify him, or talk of glorifying God.

In our normal use of the word "glory" what does it mean to us?

People receive glory when they win something, when they achieve something challenging that is admirable. We give people glory by congratulation, and praise and adulation. There is a relationship between the value to us of a person's achievement and the glory it wins them.

When we talk about the glory of God we are drawing on a very ancient history going back in to the earliest days of the Hebrew scriptures. From earliest times the Hebrew scriptures make clear that God did not have a visible bodily presence – you could not

make images of God. The place of worship in the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant, was designed to highlight a space for God's presence rather than an image of God to worship.

Language about God being present with the people talked of the "glory" of God (the Hebrew word is "Shekinah"). It meant the power of God revealed in physical form – not God's self but the power of God's presence in a tangible way. We could think about images of the pillar of fire and cloud in the journey out of Egypt, or the cloud around Mount Sinai.

This glory is utterly dependent on God's power and presence, not on whether the people approve of value it. They glorify God by their response and recognition of God's presence. Their glorification shows they have been drawn into God's action. They share in God's glory by recognising and responding to it in worship and obedience.

This gives us a helpful way into the gospel passage for today from St John's gospel. It comes from the long passage of prayer and teaching in which Jesus is preparing his disciples for his Passion. Throughout the gospel Jesus has referred to an hour that is coming. In this passage we hear him pray to the Father in the knowledge that his hour has come. He prays that the Father will glorify him, so that he may glorify the Father.

He prays that the visible presence of God's power may be seen in him, so that he can reveal the visible presence of God's power.

He says that he has glorified God – been God's presence and power visible in the world – by completing the work the Father has given him to do.

He prays for the glory that he shared in the presence of God before all things.

And in that threefold prayer he shows us a deep truth about where and how we can see and share in God's glory.

One way of looking at Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension, is that the Ascension is God's reward to Jesus for the obedience of undergoing death for us all. He wins his place in

heaven by his suffering and we honour him for his triumph. The Ascension is when Jesus receives glory.

But the prayer of Jesus in John's gospel suggests something very different.

The hour when Jesus glorifies the Father, and is himself glorified begins on the cross. The glory of God is fully revealed at the heart of the world's suffering. This is a great mystery at which we might wonder, but according to this prayer in John, it is what Jesus understood himself to be doing and revealing: God's visible power and presence laid bare on the cross. It is such a mystery, we can imagine why Jesus might have prayed that it would be a glorification – that it might, at least by those who knew him, be the true revelation of God's power.

The gospel unfolds with the stories of the resurrection which are confirmation of Jesus revelation of the Father. Thomas' affirmation "My Lord and my God" perhaps sums up Jesus' glory. Raised from the dead, he shows his disciples that he has been the visible presence of God's power and love with them.

The story of the Ascension fulfils his prayer to share once more in the glory of the closer presence of the Father.

It reminds us that Jesus' glory – his revealing of the presence and power of God among us is not something he earned, or is a result of our honouring him: it is his very nature. Jesus is the embodied presence of God's power and love, now for all eternity.

It reminds us that glory is not perhaps what we thought it was – not adulation and success – but the mystery of God's power and presence which is beyond expectation or explanation.

Jesus' purpose in revealing God's glory in living, dying and rising again was to draw us into that life of glory; to draw us in to living as those, who like him reveal God's presence in the world.

Because his prayer of glorification does not stop with his own action: he prays for his friends – those who have seen and known and believed in him: "I have been glorified in them". They have

recognised in him the revelation of God's presence, and in recognising have been drawn into that presence.

This is all quite deep Trinitarian theology – so what might it mean for us in a week in which we await Pentecost, whilst living through some of the most difficult times many can remember, in a world where suffering is evident, in a world where there are many more questions than answers?

I don't have a direct answer to my own question – except that its about where we expect to find God's glory, God's power and God's presence.

Jesus' prayer today shows us that he believes God's glory is not a triumph we have to wait for when all that is difficult has passed, the mess of human life is over and we are carried above the clouds.

In Jesus, God's glory is God's presence in the heart of all that we experience, it begins its work in us even where we were least looking for it, even when we can't see it in the midst of pain and suffering.

And perhaps, Jesus invites us to share in his way of showing God's glory in the world at the moment: not by great achievement to be honoured by the world's adulation or congratulations, but by being the people who show God's visible presence in the midst of a messy world, being the gentle companion, the voice on the phone, the bearer of kindness, the pray-er willing to open it all up to God and seek grace.

As we give glory to you, Jesus, this Ascension-tide – crucified, risen and ascended one – may we be the bearers of your tender glory in our suffering world this day. Amen.

