

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19.14)

What is glory? A deceptively simple question. One I've been asking myself all week. In the ways we tend to use it in our society, it seems to have something to do with recognition. Someone "gets the glory" when they are recognized for something good they've done or achieved, whether it's something they've done on their own or with help – maybe the lead singer of a band, or the leader of a government.

Glory also has to do with heroics – they used to talk about the glory of war as a way of attracting new recruits, war was glorious because it meant you were doing something great for your county. We also use it as a way to describe something we deem exceptionally beautiful or successful – a glorious sunrise, or a glorious concert. So glory has to do with something good that someone does or a good quality that someone or something has.

Glory also seems to be something that comes from other people. If I write an exceptional paper, but no one ever reads it, am I glorious? Or just (possibly) self-satisfied? If I run a personal best mile but don't post about it on social media, do I get any glory? Or again, just personal satisfaction? The most glorious people in our society are the ones we've all collectively decided are worth something, and we shower them with adoration, praise, sometimes wealth. Glory isn't about personal feelings, it's about how other people feel about you.

Finally, glory has a dark side. How many cultural icons can you name who have had a "fall from grace"? The list alone could fill volumes, I'm sure. You can see it all around with place names and building names being changed from names of colonial heroes, with statues being toppled, with people being "canceled" left and right in popular media. Glory tends to blind us to the fallible humanity of our idols until something happens we just can't ignore, and then we're disillusioned when we find out they're only human after all. Glory is fickle, it can change in an instant; it's something we have to constantly maintain through good deeds, proper social media presence and good PR lest we find ourselves at the mercy of our own shadow selves.

Our readings today talk a lot about glory, namely, God's glory. Now, Exodus kind of jives with the understanding of glory I've just laid out: it's big, loud, and noticeable, and projects some sort of untouchability. Throughout Exodus and the Old Testament in general, God displays His power and majesty to Israel through audio-visual feats: through a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, through earthquakes, loud noises and smoke and fire on Mount Sinai; through talking donkeys and parted seas. God's glory, as the Bible calls this power and might, is so big and so powerful that it causes Moses to light up like a Christmas tree, just by talking to God. This God is the high and lofty one, the creator and preserver of all things, maker of all things, judge of all people. This God we can understand as glorious in the way we might describe a human being as glorious: He's certainly a doer of good things, a mighty and heroic leader of His people.

And, like the dubious nature of earthly glory, if we left off here, we might be tempted to doubt the total goodness of God's glory – after all, this is the God of the Old Testament, who is wrathful and judging, who kills the Egyptian first-borns and commands the total domination of Canaan and its inhabitants. There are some scary things in the Old Testament that tend to put a lot of people off. God as He appears in his "glory" is mysterious and transcendent, not easily approached, nor easily understood.

Mark shows us an entirely different picture of God's glory. Here is Jesus, a human being who is, yes, becoming famous, but who is also humble and quiet, who does good but attempts to keep his deeds on the down-low, who pleads with everyone he helps to keep his identity a secret. Here is Jesus, born in a stable to a young woman pregnant out of wedlock. Not particularly glorious or grand.

Here also is a God who takes a deaf and mute man aside, who lays hands on him, and who gives him the ability to hear and to speak clearly. Okay, yes, that sounds like it could be glorious, but if the man and Jesus's disciples kept quiet as they were asked, would there have been anyone to bestow that glory? God's glory does still leave a mark, but it is imminently more practical than a glowing face, and it involves no noise at all, no lights or smoke or fire. Just a word, "Ephphatha" and a sympathetic touch.

Somehow, Paul interprets these two displays of God's glory – the loud and the quiet – in completely the opposite way one might expect, if one was still married to the idea of glory I laid out at the beginning of this sermon. Paul says in our reading from second Corinthians that while Moses' shining face was pretty cool, what Jesus accomplished in his humble life and ignoble death on a cross is the *real* display of God's glory. Moses' face fades behind a veil; Jesus's glory lasts forever.

So. It might be a good idea to reframe our definition of glory now. In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek words translated as "Glory" can be used to mean what we tend to mean when we talk about glory, but they are also used with a slightly different inflection. Both "Kobod" (Hebrew) and "Doxa" (Greek) can imply light, and are used to describe the shining light of, for instance, Moses's face, or Jesus's clothes at the Transfiguration.

God's glory illuminates, rather than masks, and is a mark of God's presence. It is something that impacts the people and things that come into contact with God, leaving them changed in a fundamental way. When the world encounters God closely, it is revealed to be what it truly is in God's vision; ordinary things become extraordinary to human eyes because they become what they were meant to be. Moses's face shines because, for the moment of his encounter with the living God, he is revealed to be truly made in God's image, capable of fully reflecting the glory of God. When we truly encounter God, we may not glow in the visible light spectrum, but we do reflect God's glory more fully.

I spent a year in England as part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Community of Saint Anselm. As part of this program, I went on several intensive retreats. At the very first of these retreats, I found myself encouraged to let go of a particular relationship that was weighing me down and restricting my ability to be fully open to God and to others. The actual relinquishment of this relationship was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do – there was great weeping and gnashing of teeth and deep prayer with my spiritual director. Sleep came late and with difficulty. But the next morning, I awoke with songs of praise running through my mind. I felt as though I was holding a cup that was full of light and I knew I wasn't meant to keep it, I had to give it away, let it spill all over other people – I chatted and sang through breakfast; when a brother in my community expressed a difficult experience, I couldn't help but offer him a touch and a prayer. I was the most joyful I had ever been in my life. That feeling faded throughout the day, but I will always remember how it felt to be in the presence of so much joy and love. For that day, I felt like my face was shining, and I knew without any shadow of a doubt that I had been in the presence of God the night before.

This transformative nature of God's glory is why we can celebrate the Eucharist believing that the bread and wine truly communicate to us Jesus's body and blood. The church has argued for centuries how that actually happens, but I'm here to tell you that I don't think that's the right question. The Eucharist is a moment when God's glory touches earth, and it has the capacity to transform us every time we receive.

If God's glory illuminates, it is also important to recognize that it is not something we have any stake in bestowing. God is somehow glorious in and of Himself. God simply *is* exalted because of who He is. There is no pressure for God to keep on doing more and more worthy things to keep in our good graces, and there is no danger of God falling from grace because He is the creator and sustainer of the universe; God is both the highest in the order of things, and He is the only standard of goodness there is. God is glory; His presence in fact bestows glory on us that we don't have to earn and that we don't have to fear losing.

It might have occurred to you by now to ask, why doesn't God display His glory anymore in the way He does in the Old Testament? How do we *know* we are in God's presence if He doesn't announce it, if people's faces don't glow?

When encountering and shaping Israel to be God's people, God reveals Himself in a way akin to how they might have expected other nations' gods to appear – big, loud, and local. In the ancient world, gods were associated very closely with places and particularities – that stream, this tree, this particular race of people. However, God also does so with a bit of a twist – anything those gods can do, God can do bigger and better.

However, when God revealed Himself to be the God not just of Israel but of the whole world, God also revealed Himself to be nothing like any god anyone had heard of before. This is a God who chooses not just a people but all peoples, to be His own. Paul's famous doxology in Ephesians, which is said at the end of the Eucharistic service in the BAS, says it best: "Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever, Amen." In Jesus, God reveals Himself to be a God who cares about the smallest and the weakest and to be a God whose glory quietly seeks out the lost, rather than trumpeting its own vanity from the hilltops. With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, God sent His glory – that is, His own presence and breath – into each and every believer. The church throughout the world is in fact the glory of God writ large against the world, with the capacity to reach out and touch more people than any plume of smoke or peal of trumpet. Our vocation then, as Paul says in our epistle today, is to be that glory, to minister to others in the Spirit of God.

The coming of the Law on Mount Sinai revealed God as righteous judge, and provided a yardstick against we can all measure ourselves and inevitably fail. This is why Paul calls it the ministry of condemnation – the first revelation of God's glory showed us how big God is and how small we are; it showed us what happens to those who reject the life that is God's presence.

But the coming of the Spirit announced God's intention to remake every single one of us into that perfect image that can fully reflect God's glorious light and glorious self. Moses's face faded in time, but the glory we have in God through Christ Jesus will never fade. Whether we feel like good Christians or not, we carry God's glory with us wherever we go.