

Sermon 2 February 2025 Glorifying God

Isaiah 40:27-31 John 17:1-8

This prayer of Jesus, as this Gospel passage is sometimes known, takes place after the Last Supper and just before Jesus and his disciples retire to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was arrested. And so Jesus is looking to the cross where he will finally find glory with God. *'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that people may glorify you.'* John 17:1.

It is interesting, and a little sad, that it is invariably in death that people find their glory. When someone dies we extol their attributes, their qualities, their achievements. I often find myself reflecting as I sit and listen to eulogies that it would be nice if all these things were said to a person while they were still alive. Sometimes they are, but all too often that is not the case. Something for us all to be mindful of, I think.

So why was the cross the glory of Jesus? And just as importantly, how can we give glory to God?

To answer the first question very briefly, because in the end it is a question to be addressed at Easter, the cross was the completion of his work and the beginning of his verification as the Son of God through the Resurrection. You obviously cannot have the Resurrection without the cross, but let's leave that discussion until Easter.

One way of giving glory to God is by obeying him. If a child is obedient to its parents, he/she honours those parents. *'Children, obey your parents for this is the right thing to do. If you honour your father and mother, things will go well for you.'* Ephesians 6:1-2. In making that journey to the cross, Jesus was being extremely obedient to his father. He knew he had to go through with it; he knew it was expected of him.

How does this apply to us? We know what is expected of us as children of God. We know what we are capable of when we have faith in Christ, when we accept him into our lives. I refer to our reading from Isaiah: *'Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.'* Isaiah 40:31. Let me tell you a little parable, the parable of the ducks.

There was this town where only ducks live. Every Sunday, the ducks waddle out of their houses and waddle into the church and squat in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and takes its place, and then the duck minister comes forward and opens the duck Bible. He reads to them, *'Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you. No fences can hold you. You have wings. God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds.'* And all the ducks shouted, *'Amen!'* And then they all waddled home.

The best way we can glorify God is to take on board everything he has to offer us, and we look to Christ for the guide on that, and then to live it. There really is no point in coming to church, listening to his word, singing his praises, conversing with him through prayer, signing off with a well-intentioned 'Amen', and then going off into our daily lives and not reflecting all that in our lives. In other words, not really changing but carrying on in very much the same way as we always have.

True faith must lead to growth. We come to church for an experience that hopefully directs and leads to a place where our faith is nurtured and fed. The point is, God and Christ are real.

There is the well-known story of Corrie Ten Boom whose family hid Jews above their watch-makers shop until she and her sister, Betsy, were arrested by the Nazis and put in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. There Betsy died.

After the war Corrie was speaking in a church in Munich. After her talk, she was shaking hands with people and she found herself confronted by a man she recognised as having been a guard in the camp. He said to her, 'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk. I was a guard there, but since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, will you forgive me?'

Corrie says that at first she could not. Betsy had died in that place. Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? Corrie says that it could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to her it felt like ages as she wrestled with the most difficult decision she had ever had to make.

She stood there with the coldness touching her heart, but she knew that forgiveness is not an emotion, it is an act of the will. She knew what she had to do. She prayed silently, 'Jesus, help me. I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'

So woodenly, mechanically, she thrust her hand into the hand outstretched to her and offered forgiveness. As she did, an incredible thing happened. She says a current started in her shoulder, raced down her arm and sprang into their joined hands. Then a healing warmth seemed to flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes.

She cried, 'I forgive you, brother, with all my heart.' For a long moment they grasped each other's hands. Corrie had never known God's love so intensely as she did then.

I tell this story, not because we should all expect similar dramatic experiences to happen to us, but because this is an authentic testimony to the fact that God is real and Jesus is a vital presence amongst us. I repeat what I said a few moments ago – God and Christ are real. It is important that we live our lives in a way that testifies that. There can be no better way of giving glory to God than that.

As I said before, true faith leads to growth. Now, the point is this, to grow must entail a degree of change. That is inevitable, and we could spend another 15 minutes just exploring that. I just finish with words from 1 Peter 1:14-15: *'So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy.'*