"CAN WE DO WITHOUT 'GLORY'?"

a '00 first Sunday after Epiphany sermon

- As I began to write this sermon, a pastor phoned & said how's the weather? & I said "Glorious! New-fallen snow for Christmas!" & he said "Nothing here but snert!" "Snert?" I said. "The name of Haggar the Horrible's dog, what else?" "Snert!" said he, "a nasty mix of snow & dirt."
- How like life, I thought, a mix of glory & dirt. I don't have to ask if you "Dirt" is dirt with all the connotations pertaining thereto, know what I mean. & "glory" is whatever <u>lifts</u> you, or at least your inner life, out of whatever dirt you are groveling in from time to time & from day to day to day to day. Messes other people made & you stepped in. Messes you yourself made & stepped in, which is even worse. Messes nature made in the mystery of evil paralleling the mystery of good. Manmade old messes human beings are suffering from because of long memories the "delete" key has not yet been used on.
- And you know why I used the word "glorious" for our new-fallen snow. When the sun shines on it, it glistens & sparkles with the brilliance of an epiphany, a divine appearance. In the Church Year, yesterday was Epiphany, the revelation of Jesus' divinity at his baptism, of which we read this morning in the Third Gospel, Luke 3.15-17,21-22. Later the day came to celebrate the manifestation of the divine Infant to the Magi, who represented the lesser glories of the earth (so artists show light streaming not from the Magi but from the Manger). And of course the liturgical color for Epiphany, Jan.6, the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas, is white, snowwhite.
- If I were to tell you, at this point in this sermon, that I have been talking about "kavod" & "doxa," even though those words may be unfamiliar you would suspect that they have something to do with light. The brilliance of sun on newfallen snow. The radiance around the head or the whole body of Jesus or a saint (a halo [from a ring around the sun] around the head, a nimbus around the whole body, a ["golden"] areole around either).

Those two words are the Bible's main way of saying "glory." "Kavod" is the chief among the 25 OT Hebrew/Aramaic words translated into the Greek OT (Septuagint) by that other unfamiliar word, "doxa," which is usually translated into English as "glory," as are the most prominent of those Hebrew words. needn't suggest that you not try to remember this technical lexical stuff, you've already forgetten it. But it makes a point important for the burden, the message, of this sermon: the word "glory," representing a multitude of words in the languages of the Bible, is spread all over Scripture & thus is--to answer the question which our sermon-title asks--is not a word we Christians can do without: it's on the short list of words necessary in the Christian language.

- Can't you be a Christian without certain words? Why necessary? course not! You can't be a Christian without thinking as Christians think--any more than you can use a computer without learning at least a little computerese, the language of the information highway. A recent issue of "Access," the free computer-magazine that comes with the Sunday paper, puts it thus: "Your most important computer skill: understanding how the computer thinks." Now let's substitute the word "Bible" for the word "computer" in that sentence. what we get: "Your most important Bible skill is understanding how the Bible thinks." We expose ourselves daily to the Bible in order to learn Biblethink. To the extent that we do Biblethink, we do Godthink: God, who is the Bible's central character, becomes our life's central character, & God's glory becomes our central aim day by day and both to & through our death.
- The psalm we read this morning says it precisely: "in God's temple all say 'GLORY!'" (29.9). Why? Why shout "Glory!" in the temple? reason the Chrismas angels sang "Glory to God in the highest": they didn't skip church, regular worship in the heavenly temple. You don't really sing glory in the temple, i.e. in church, unless you've been singing it day by day during the previous week. And if then you really sing glory in church, you will continue

to sing it after the benediction & throughout the new week. Everything in your life & in the world can offer glory, praise, & honor to God if you will it so & work it so.

Maybe a story, a true story, will help. On the campus of a college in which I'd just matriculated, I discovered 65 years ago, obscured by forest, an aged tabernacle from frontier campmeeting days. Now the woods concealed the origin of the college, which was founded to continue, but in a different mode, the shouting of glory. So that nobody could mistake what the tabernacle was for, every one of the concrete foundation-posts had "GLORY" painted on it, on all four sides! (I crawled underneath to check out the back of the posts.) No glory, no tabernacle, & no college. Whatever glory is, it was not only important but essential & high-placed in the language of the builders of that tabernacle & a thousand others like it, including the Craigville Tabernacle, less than a half hour's walk from our church.

In our psalm, the context of glory is **nature** as a creature & revealer of God. It's Christmas day, & I just broke off writing this Thinksheet to make a pinhole in a darkcolored card & let the sun shine through the hole onto a piece of white paper so we could see an awesome sight, a solar eclipse (40% obscuration of the sun by the moon), the first on Christmas day in 46 years. A glorious sight if you let your imagination expand to provide room for your feelings of awe & wonder & praise to expand. Every day the sun is a glory to the earth even when we say, oddly, "it's not shining today." An eclipse--or, as in this psalm, a storm--is something unusual inviting us to consider that the usual, the every-day, is also miraculous (again, if we choose to see it so)....

....and the psalm ends with the LORD glorious in history as "king" over humanity as well as nature & thus able to provide "strength" & "wellbeing" (Tanakh, instead of "peace") for his people, for he is present with us, as our first reading this morning, ls.43.1-7, repeatedly affirms....

- 7as does our third reading, Ac.8.14-17. As today is something new-the first Sunday of the month, the year, the century, & the millenium--the Samaritan Christians experienced something new under the ministry of Peter & John: "they received the Holy Spirit," God present in transforming power, fulfilling the promise we read about in our Gospel text this morning.
- In my 3x5 files under "Glory," I came upon a pamphlet titled "Catechism for Young Children" (Presb.Ch.in USA/41). Here's how it begins: "Who made you? A:God. Q:What else did God make? A:God made all things. Q:Why did God make you and all things? A:For his own glory. Q:How can you glorify God? A:By loving him and doing what he commands. Q:Why ought you to glorify God? A:Because he made me and takes care of me. Q:Are there more gods than one? A:There is only one God." That ends page one. Whatever glory is, the catechism implies, it's something that you don't have to be a grownup to grasp & let grasp you. As in this catechism, at its heart it's what Dante's DIVINE COMEDY calls "the Love that moves the worlds," to Whom in the Lord's Prayer we return love in holy obedience, "hallowed be Thy Name."
- "No" is the answer to the question which forms this sermon's title. No, we human beings cannot do without glory; but we can sin twice against it. We can give glory to what is <u>unworthy</u>: to war, to sex, to money & what only it can buy, to sports, to work & its honors, even to doing good without giving glory to the Source of human good—which is the second sin: the failure to give glory to the One, the only one, who is <u>worthy</u> of "blessing & honor, glory & power" (in a biblical phrase familiar from Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus").

As for us, we are unworthy to participate in the divine glory, of which we have "fallen short" (Ro.3.23). But the Good News of the gospel is that through our repentance \mathcal{E} our faith, the God of glory has given himself to us in the shame of the cross \mathcal{E} by the power of the resurrection of Jesus, in whom God "revealed his glory" (Jn.2.11). And our appropriate response is to try, aided by grace, to "do all to the glory of God" (1Cor.10.31), to his praise \mathcal{E} to improve his reputation (the base meaning of $\delta \acute{o} \subseteq \alpha doxa$, which occurs hundreds of times in the earliest Christian full Bible). So I begin every day with "Glory to God...."