

a '00 first Sunday after Epiphany sermon

6 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? For the same reason the Christmas 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

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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 everyday, 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, Is.43.1-7, repeatedly affirms....

7 ....as 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.

8 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."

9 "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 unworthy: 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 worthy 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 & our faith, the God of glory has given himself to us in the shame of the cross & 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 & to improve his reputation (the base meaning of *δόξα doxa*, which occurs hundreds of times in the earliest Christian full Bible). So I begin every day with "Glory to God...."