

# "WHERE'S THE GLORY?"

SERMON for the first Sunday  
in Advent  
SCRIPTURES:  
Isaiah 2.1-5; Psalm 122;  
Matthew 24.36-44

Loree suggested that we not have a turkey this Thanksgiving but I wanted one so she said "You buy it, you cook it" & I said OK & I bought it & the next time I saw that turkey it was coming out of the oven. It went right in the center of the table, right where every Thanksgiving turkey should be--for is not the turkey the GLORY of Thanksgiving Day?--& everything else, all the lesser glories, were beautifully arranged around it. This sermon's title is "Where's the glory?" & the Thanksgiving dinner's answer is "Right there! Right in the center! It's the turkey!"

1 Now wouldn't you like to have your life as beautiful, as beautifully arranged as a Thanksgiving dinner-table? Only the turkey, the heaviest thing on the table, is worthy of being central: what in your life is heaviest, most important, & so worthy of being in the center? You might answer with some questions for clarification. You might say "Do you mean before or after breakfast?" Or, "Do you mean when I'm well or when I'm sick?" Or, "Do you mean what actually is heaviest, most important--or what I'd like to have at the center of my life?" I'll take that last question, & say that in your coming to church at least your feet are saying that what you'd like to have at the center of your life is the Light which is the center of the universe & of the Church's life--beautifully & powerfully expressed in 2Cor.4.6 NRSV: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the GLORY of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

2 In that great sentence, notice that the answer to this sermon's location-question, "Where's the glory?" is, for the Christian, just this: the glory is "In the face of Jesus Christ." A certain U.S. senator became famous for his answer when he was asked to define pornography: "I can't, but I know it when I see it." Christians are those who can't define glory but who know it when they see it "in the face of Jesus Christ." That face is the glory, the only face that is the glory of heaven come to earth, into our flesh (which is what the theological word "incarnation" means). A few months ago, at the college from which I was first graduated 66 years ago, we heard a great sermon preached by a man who, on his first day of college, was by hazing reading-blinded: he could never read again, & dropped out of college before his second day. Very old, eager to walk into the arms of God, he said what he most wanted to see in heaven is "the beauty of his face, the face of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior." Well, now, before we die, where may we see his face? We have no photograph, no painting, no drawing, not even a verbal description. We can no more see him with our physical eyes than hazing-blinded Olson Clark can read. But we can see him, sometimes, with our whole being. He suffered for us: we can see him, as Mother Teresa said, on the face of sufferers for whom we care. Because he loved without limit, we can see him on the face of lovers when with joy our hearts enter into their love. And because in the prayer he taught us he called upon us to give glory to God ("hallowed-glorified be Thy name"), we can see his face when with penitent & purposeful hearts we seek to pray without ceasing, to practice the presence (the shekinah-glory) of God, to join with our fellow-believers in public worship, adoration, praise, song, & prayer. He gave everything he had: we can see him when we give anything we have. And, as he died for us, to the extent that we have lived for him, giving him the glory, when we come to do our dying, we shall see him in his dying & rising again. Therefore, "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time; all the light of sacred story / gathers 'round its head sublime."

3 Back to that turkey you ate three days ago. I said it was the central glory of the Thanksgiving dinner-table, the heaviest thing on the table, the glory-thing: in the OT, the word for glory ("kabod") means heaviness, therefore what is most important. So we're back to the question what is heaviest, most important, in your life? If your life centers in anything other than the glory of God, you are living for something lighter than God intended for you &, in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, provided for you. The Red Sox hadn't won the World Series since before I was born, but how much of your time is the sports section worth: what is the relative weight of commercialized entertainment, which is the virtual religion of millions of Americans

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(else thousands of entertainers wouldn't be multimillionaires)?

4 In the NT, the word for glory means "reputation." The Bible's central concern is God's reputation & our influence on it. Does your neighbor have a better opinion of God because of the way you live, or a worse opinion? Victorian parents used to charge their children leaving home with this injunction: "Remember! The family name is now in your hands!" And it is the first concern in the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy name" means "Help us to remember to make you & your reputation central in our living, to let nothing be as important as praising-loving-serving you."

No wonder the words "glory" & "glorious" are so common in our religion. For example, in our Order of Worship today they appear 7 times, & the Greek word for glory ("doxa") appears in the English word "doxology" (which signals us to sing "Glory be...."). Further, in the four hymns we are singing this morning, the words "glory" & "glorious" appear 17 times! You may not be able to define glory except as on the face of Jesus Christ--but if with regularity you read your Bible & attend public worship, you see "glory--glorious--glorify--glorified" often enough for it to define you as somebody serious about being a Christian.

5 Today, Advent Sunday, new year's day in the church year, calls us--as persons, as families, as this church family--to self-examination & where our priorities have been misweighed, this day & season calls us to repentance & newness of life with the glory of God as the center, the weightiest of all the importances in our lives. Our responsive Psalm (66) this morning began with words that ~~de~~-center us from false centers & center us on the true center, the glory of God: "Cry out with joy to God all the earth, / O sing to the GLORY of his name / rendering GLORIOUS praise!" Now, to sharpen up our Christian vision of the true center, the glory of God "in the face of Jesus Christ," let's list some false centers:

(1) VIOLENCE is a false center. Some folks wrongly think that if they can only use enough of it, they can impose their vision on the world. Depending on your point of view, these are called terrorists or patriots. Our 1st scripture-reading this morning tells us that when we "walk in the light of the Lord" (light being--as in halos--the primary metaphor for glory), violence--"war" will cease. This Advent vision of Isaiah is not pacifist (the ideological rejection of force) but pacific (Jerusalem recreated to "settle disputes among nations," so they need "never again prepare for battle"). We need to aspire & pray & work toward both a new Jerusalem & a new America. Some folks wrongly imagine that "the separation of church & state" can be stretched to mean the separation of religion & politics: whenever--wherever that has been tried, politics has become the religion, the leaders--with both sacred & secular sanctions in their hands--have been tyrants, & the people slaves.

(2) Another false center is (esp. since Descartes, who d. in 1650) the SELF, one's self-centered self, looking out mainly for Number One. If that's the life our Lord Jesus had led, our pastor could not conclude his sermons with the words "Thanks be to God for this GLORIOUS gospel": there would be no good news; there would be no Easter, for there would be no Good Friday; Jesus would have gotten along by going along, like almost everybody else, as painlessly as possible but profoundly sick. Two men have made millions off one symptom of this sickness, viz. the fear of being "left behind." Abusing the third Bible passage you heard me read this morning, they claim that if you figure it right, when Advent is complete (the Second Coming) you will be "raptured" with the saints & not "left behind" with the sinners. Two things wrong with that corruption of the Christian religion: (a) If you just must get to heaven, you won't: the self-centered, not having loved God first & neighbor next, are excluded from not having followed Jesus' example; & (2) maybe the text means--we Bible scholars can't know--that the "raptured" will be snatched away for judgment, & the blessed will be the "left behind"!

(3) Yet another false clue as to where the glory is is commercialized ECSTATIC experience. Read your Bible instead of watching "Desperate Housewives," oggling the latest exciting movie,\* or making an unnecessary trip to the mall (because MadAv has made you poor in the sense of wanting something you don't have & don't need, & Jesus smiles not when you're a getter but a giver). \*catching the next TV football,

The middle scripture I read to you this morning plainly answers this sermon's question. To find the glory, "Let us go to the house of the Lord'."