

John 13:31-35  
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“Love Gloriously”

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This past week I got curious about how popular culture uses the word “glory.”

Here are a few recent news headlines that use the word glory. One article tells of a boy band who is “in all their glory” because they are dressed in expensive Christian Dior Clothes. Next, a new film in the Cannes film festival has Johnny Deep’s character as a War Photographer during the “glory days of WW II.” A third headline tells us Tiger Woods is “in the hunt for more Glory.” Finally, another article had the audacity to suggest winning the Tiddlywinks championship helped a person “reclaim their glory.” Tiddlywinks?? Glory? Really?

We have gotten the wrong idea about Glory!

Glory has come to mean fame, success and notoriety. It has come to indicate someone who can defeat their opponent, or buy expensive things all the time. The word is used to describe a person who is able to boast and brag about all the great things they have done. This is not the way the bible uses the word “glory” at all. When we seek the religious meaning of ‘glory;’ we learn that all glory has its source in God, not in us, and all glory is returned to God, for without God we aren’t able to do anything. Glory belongs to the Holy One who calls us into fellowship and service with others.

Today, near the end of Jesus’ life we hear great words of wisdom. These are the words Jesus has carefully selected so that they will remain ringing in the ears of his followers long after he has left them. These words will become a major part of his legacy, or so he hopes. He shares them to help us understand the glory of his death; how deeply his death serves as an offering of life for others. So here in John’s gospel this speech becomes Jesus’ way of saying: my life, my body, my memory, and all the goodness running through my veins is God’s love and I desire that Love to live on in and through my disciples.

In this story we see Jesus Glorified, but not in the way we expect. His Glory is not something that comes from fame, money, success, social status, or power; Jesus’ glory springs from his tremendous, selfless love. His glory comes from having a serving heart. And though we sometimes forget, God’s glorious love is extended to all living things.

At the end of April we celebrated Earth day. Often when the church talks about God’s glorious love our perspective has been limited, selective, centered in one species, humans. In our discussions and actions we have often treated non-human life as mere resources which exist only to serve our need or greed. But Earth day reminds us non-human life has its own way of giving praise and glory to God. Each spring the greenness of the grass gives thanks to God. As the leaves burst out creating shade unseen in months, those leaves give glory to God. As pesky bees buzz around, as the tulips bloom at Boerner Botanical Garden, in these and more ways the non-human world reflect God’s glory. Today’s lesson about Glory is sewn right into

the fabric of creation. It is what we yearn for in nature most: It's serenity. It's beauty. It's color. All of this is nature's way to give Glory. God's Glorious love belongs to sharks, and whales, dogs and cats, hawks and wild turkey, flowers and streams, as well as humankind.

So, Jesus offers simple yet powerful words as he prepares to leave his disciples, "love one another." For Jesus it's another way of saying the whole world will know my creation... not by our sermons or rituals, not by how many committee meetings we have; not by our fame, or fortune, not by our grand fortresses... we will be known by the ways we relentlessly love one another with the Love God has given us.

Jesus died on the cross because the world in which he lived had strayed so far from the true understanding of God's glorious love. Kings believed they were loved because they had acquired so much power. Power became equated with love. Other leaders in that day were finding a way to rename corruption, as love. They were finding ways to rename exclusion, as love. They were finding ways to twist peoples fear of strangers and foreigners and call that fear - love. They were making all the wrong things in this world, sound like there were "of God." And Jesus knew that was not God's glorious love.

When the world says strong people get revenge on their enemies, Jesus says, 'my strongest people love their enemies.' When the world calls for violence, "Jesus says the ways of glory make for non-violent peace." When the world says we should fear people we don't know, and those who are different from us; Jesus says, "My courageous followers love the foreigner and welcome the stranger." When the world tells us the struggle against institutions that oppress and disadvantage is too impossible; Jesus says, "my people work for justice with a calm assurance that God's glorious Love is available to each living creature."

God's love is not a sentimental or harmonious feeling. It is the most powerful force in the world.

Jesus did not die on the cross to make a vengeful Old Testament God more loving. He did not suffer to take our punishment on himself. He went to the cross to show us in word and action that God is love and as God's children, we are deeply and fully loved. We are full of God's grace, and able to shine with God's glory each day.

Within the last couple weeks, in Colorado, there was another school shooting, this time at the STEM school. The damage was minimized to a degree when 18 year old Kendrick Castillo lunged at the shooter. Senior Nui Giasolli said, "Kendrick lunged at [the suspect], and he shot Kendrick, giving all of us enough time to get underneath our desks, to get ourselves safe, and to run across the room to escape."

Castillo's parents said, "We're not surprised because that was in his makeup. You know, Kendrick was a giving kid. He would do something to save his friends if he knew he had to do it," said his father, John Castillo.

The parents said Kendrick's quick thinking prevented more deaths. "If he didn't do it, what would this mess look like?... He gave up his life for others."

I hope none of us ever need to make this decision, and I deeply pray our leaders can do something to reduce these incidents in the future, but this young person stands as an example to all of us of God's glorious Love.

While this example is extreme, it helps us redefine society's misunderstanding of "God's Glory." We hear it when Jesus says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Amen