

Easter 5, 24.4.16

Acts 11:1-18, Rev 21:1-6, John 13:31-35

God's Love in Action, God is glorified.

Today's gospel reading may be short, 5 verses, but it manages to raise questions. **First.** Although we have recently been through Lent, Good Friday and the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day, we are returned to Maundy Thursday, the night before Jesus died on the cross. Why are we going backwards?

Just before our reading Judas is told to go and do what he plans, that is to betray Jesus to the religious authorities. The train of events which are to take place over the next few days have now been set in motion by Judas' action. We are told that it was night. John's gospel of signs and symbols, alerts us to the fact that something dark and evil is to happen.

Next, surprisingly, our reading begins by associating this horror with Jesus declaring, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified"! What does it mean that Jesus is glorified? Dark is being linked with light? What is going on? What does 'glory' mean, the glory of God, for example? How is someone, God, Jesus or anyone else glorified? Ideas???

The dictionary defines 'glorify' as making glorious, splendid, radiant, to worship etc. In the Bible, glory usually relates to God—the powerful and radiant reality of God. When Moses spoke with God on Mount Sinai, his face was changed, it shone and he had to wear a veil hide it. On a mountain Jesus was transfigured before his disciples, shining with the glory of God. But this shining figure of Jesus is talking about his coming death. I saw a painting the other day of the new-born Jesus in a manger bathed in a radiant light. It was not true in one sense, but demonstrated the truth of God's presence and love for creation.

Returning to our Bible passage, Jesus tells the disciples he is going away where they cannot go. Where is he going—alone? His friends are distressed. Jesus follows this statement by giving them a new commandment, they are to love one another as he has loved them. This love will identify them as his followers. They already know the first commandment, to love God with their whole being, and a later commandment telling them to love their neighbour as themselves.

These puzzling statements closely connect God's glory and God's love. Love is the essence of God. "God is love" we might have sung as a child. But God's love is not static nor just a warm emotional feeling. God is love in action. That is why we think of God as one and also as three, the Trinity, it is to reveal the love of God as a relationship, something given and received which glorifies those involved. God's love is spoken of as the Spirit being poured out to the Son and returned to the Father. It is seen as **the glory of God.**

As Christians today, we can read in the gospels of God's love revealed by Jesus of Nazareth in his birth, ministry, death and resurrection. This divine glory of God is seen *in the flesh* of a human being, Jesus, not separate from it, or through it as with a window. St Ireneus declared in the 2nd C "The glory of God is a human being fully alive". He was describing Jesus and his followers, even us when we show the same love to others in our daily lives. Recently I had a birthday and Fiona, at age 90, spent the whole afternoon cooking a curry for me to eat that evening because she thought that I liked curry! In a small way her act revealed the glory of God.

When we talk about the glory and wonder of God, we are talking about God's love seen in things like friendship, sharing, freedom and compassion. The disciples who accompanied Jesus around Palestine saw

God's love shown in Jesus' relationships with people. In John's Gospel examples of God's love in Jesus' ministry are often described as "signs" that glorify God.

The **first** sign is when Jesus changes water into wine. The host at the wedding is facing shame in front of his guests because the wine has run out. Jesus' mother asks her son to help. Large jars filled with water are taken to serve the guests. The steward first tastes the liquid, now wine, and with astonishment praises the bridegroom.

The **second** sign is in Capernaum where Jesus heals at a distance, the son of a royal official who is a Gentile. An outsider is loved.

Then we have Jesus healing a **crippled man** on the Sabbath. He has been waiting for 38 years for someone to carry him to the pool when the water is stirred up, so he can be healed. Jesus tells the man to stand up, pick up his mat and walk. The Religious Leaders are angry. Both Jesus and the man are accused of breaking the law by working on the Sabbath, healing and carrying a mat. For Jesus, the command to love one's neighbour by healing him takes precedence over a Sabbath rule.

A somewhat different event is when a large **crowd of 5,000** who have come a long distance to listen to Jesus are hungry. Jesus meets their basic need. He uses the few loaves and fish available, making them enough to feed everyone with plenty left over.

A significant healing, also performed on the Sabbath, is that of the **man born blind**. Jesus and the disciples notice this man as they walk along the road. He is probably begging, but we are not told. Jesus makes mud by spitting on the ground, and anoints the man's eyes. He then tells the man to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash the mud off. When he does, he sees. Again Jesus is accused of breaking the law by making mud— working, on the Sabbath. The man formerly blind is thrown out of the synagogue by the Religious Leaders when he states that Jesus is from God. Jesus finds him and talks with him. The blind man sees *and* understands, and becomes a disciple.

Towards the end of Jesus' life we have the **story of Lazarus'** restoration to life. Jesus is now a marked man, with the Religious authorities wanting to kill him, and so is staying across the Jordan river in a desert place. After hearing that his friend is ill, Jesus waits 2 days before telling his disciples that Lazarus has died and they are going back to Judea. By the time Jesus and his companions reach Bethany, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. People gather, and Jesus tells them they will see the glory of God. The stone is moved and Jesus calls Lazarus out. He comes, shuffling, still bound in grave cloths. Jesus directs the people to free him and let him go. Now the Religious leaders plan to kill Jesus *and* Lazarus.

Finally the **glory of God** is shown clearly in Jesus' death and resurrection. The two events go together because they are a united expression of God's life-giving love for us. God, incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, lived, died and was raised to life out of love. The ultimate triumph of God affirming life over death is revealed to us.

Jesus glorified God in his life through his love, freeing those suffering shame, pain, grief, an inability to move, hunger, being unable to see or understand, and even being dead, and offered them new life. Neither Jesus nor the people he fed, healed or raised to life were always glorified by society because of what happened to them, but God's love and glory was revealed by them to those who could see and understand.

Tomorrow is **Anzac Day** when we are reminded of the horror of wars, the unnecessary deaths of so many people and also the actions of heroes who died to save others. They glorified God, we might say, through acts of love. In WW1 we remember how Simpson risked and eventually lost his life by taking a donkey

into a war zone to carry wounded soldiers to safety. In WW2 people in Europe hid Jews and told lies to save them from the Nazis. On ABC TV *Compass* last Sunday there was a story of Polish Jews whose lives were saved by neighbours and a Catholic Priest. Two women were hidden in the top of a barn for 2 years. Two other women were saved by local people and taken to safety, joining 14 other Jews in a Catholic Church. When the priest was asked if he would take 2 more, he replied, "I might as well be killed for harbouring 16 as 14".

At the end of today's passage, Jesus explains how his followers are to glorify God. They/we are to love one another, as he has loved us. We are to love others unconditionally, being prepared even to give our life for their life! We are seldom asked to physically die for another, but we *are* asked to die to what we want to do when someone phones us at an awkward moment—perhaps when we are trying to do some gardening, or sending an email. Or we are stopped down the street to listen to someone in need, when we thought we were in a hurry. We might be unexpectedly confronted by a stranger needing help, and must make a decision whether to ignore the person or become involved. How do we respond and in what frame of mind? Does love, God's essence, become central to our lives and guide our decisions each day?

Last week SBS TV interviewed Chida Govera from Zimbabwe who was orphaned at age 8. Her mother died of Aids and left her to care for a 5yr old brother and a grandmother nearly 100 years old. She was sexually abused and beaten by uncles. At 11, Chida was invited by the United Methodist Church to a 5 day workshop to learn to farm mushrooms using organic waste. Eventually she sold mushrooms to pay school fees, and taught many other orphaned girls how to grow food and sell it. She even helped her uncles, whom she forgave, because she said if she did not, she hurt herself. By sharing her knowledge and forgiving others, Chida surely glorified God and God was glorified in her.

To sum up, these few verses of today's reading, give us a deeper insight into the meaning of Easter. When we love others in the same way as Jesus, we witness to the love of God triumphing over death and bringing new life. We glorify God and God is glorified in us and others, through the life-giving relationships of our ordinary everyday lives.

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