

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

January 24, 2009

The Glory of God

**Ps 19 & Luke 4:14-21
(Hymns – 248, 10, 298, 495))**

This morning I want to reflect with you
on how we come to know God's glory.
How do we come to know this God we worship
as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer?
Is one way better than another?
What way should come first
to truly understand who this God is
and what this God calls for in grateful response to their love?

Let me stop here for a bit of an aside.
You may have caught me
using the pronoun 'their'
when talking of God's love.
It sounds strange and awkward.
Why not just use the old traditional 'his' love?
The reason that I'm testing out,
and I'm only testing it at this point,
is that Christians understand God to be a community of three persons,
the Trinity,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Our God is a 'they' rather than a 'he' or even a 'she'.
Traditionally, we've emphasized the One
in the idea of the Trinity being 'Three in One'
and our use of the singular pronoun follows from this.
But why not emphasize the 'Three'
and use the plural pronoun?
In an age when individualism and egotism
threatens the very fabric of our society,
perhaps it's time for the Church to
witness to the power and potential of genuine loving community.
Some theologians are beginning to emphasize
this communal nature of our Christian God
and I find myself drawn to their way of thinking.
It is different and it is challenging,
but I think it points to a richer and deeper understanding
of God and 'their' glory.

I will probably go back and forth
in my use of pronouns for God
as we move through our journey
of being search by the Psalms,
but I wanted you to know what was going on here.
I'd love to hear what you think.

Psalm 19 bears witness to three ways of knowing God's glory –
the glory of God we see in nature,
the glory of God revealed to us in the *torah*
(or law of the Lord),
and the glory of God we experience in redemption.

Psalm 19 begins with the way the heavens and the earth
declare and proclaim the glory of God.
It is a silent but articulate witness
to the handiwork of God as Creator
of all that is.

The Psalm then turns our attention
to the way the regularity and benefits of the sun,
that most essential dynamic of nature,
tells of the glory of God.
God is seen as a bridegroom,
a strong bridegroom,
bringing joy and warmth to the whole of creation.
This is something to be appreciated and praised.
Remember, when we read and sing the Psalms
we are participating in the long history
of the people of God at worship together
as a community,
reflecting upon and building among themselves
those loving relationships
that characterize the relationships
among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
in the Trinity.

If nature is something that God has lovingly created
and is still creating through all the complex processes
that we see at work,
then we have an obligation under our covenant with God,
or the *torah*,
to care for nature as God is caring for nature.
We are being called to be environmentalists,

preserving and enhancing this gift entrusted to us.
We are being called to care for our home,
God's home for all the living creatures of his loving hands.

So, we come to know God's glory
in the lesser glories of creation.

The next section of the Psalm
testifies to the glory of God
in their laws, decrees, precepts, and ordinances,
in the profound respect and honour(or fear)
we give to their will and wishes.

This is the *torah*.
It is a much richer concept
than simply a law to be obeyed.
It's full meaning is laid out
in the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures,
the Pentateuch,
consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus,
Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
At the heart of these books
lie the actions of God in creation
and in choosing a people
to work with them
in developing and caring for the project
that God initiated in creation,
the building of a community of flourishing love,
the Kingdom or Reign of God.

The heart of the covenant
is established with Abraham,
seen by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
as the father of their faiths.
This common lineage is worth pondering and honouring.
That covenant is simple yet profound.
I will be your God and your will be my people.
I will protect you and give you everything you need to flourish.
You will worship me and be a blessing to all peoples.
And the emphasis here is to *all* peoples.
God blesses us in order for us to bless others.
That's pretty basic and beneficial stuff.

If you read carefully,
and with your mind and heart open to true learning,
you will find this covenant theme at the very heart

of both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

This people God desires as a partner
is forged as a community
through the trying and testing times of the Exodus.
It takes shape, and distorts that shape,
in the times of the Judges and Kings.
It falls into dysfunction and distress
in the times of the Prophets
and is recalled again and again
to remember and restore
the original covenant way of being
in and for the world.
Those calls are ignored by most.

Finally,
in faithfulness to and fulfillment of the original covenant,
God comes in the flesh,
in the person of Jesus Christ
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
to renegotiate the original deal and seal it with their blood.
A new covenant people are formed through the Church,
but the same obligations and benefits hold.
We are blessed in order to be a blessing.
That is the heart of the law of the Lord,
the *torah* by which we discipline our lives.

When that law is written upon our hearts
by the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of the Church,
we see the glory of God in human beings fully alive,
in humans living out consciously the gifts of
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.
(Galatians 5:22-23a)

So, we come to know the glory of God
through God's story in relating to human beings,
and through the mutual obligations and benefits
that develop as that relationship matures.

But we don't know God's glory most clearly
by simply looking at the laws that emerge from this story.
We know God's glory most clearly
by experiencing the grace that lies behind the laws,
the grace that is becoming a blessing
when those precepts and disciplines are actually practiced.

We know God's glory when that grace becomes flesh.

And that brings to Jesus Christ.
It brings us to God's final act of redemption,
taking flesh,
coming to live as a human being,
loving, teaching, and dying for us,
all in fulfillment of the original covenant.
This is where we most clearly see the glory of God,
in the servant Lord who seals our friendship with God,
who incorporates us – all of us – into the community
that is the Trinity,
that is God.

We see the true nature and depths of the glory of God
when we experience acceptance into God themselves,
when we are drawn into Christ to live in Christ
through baptism and the disciplines of the Christian community.

This is what those final words of the Psalm
point to so powerfully.
These words are often used,
as I have frequently,
as the preacher's prayer before the sermon.
As we gather in worship
week after week
to be reminded of the glory of God
and our place in it,
we pray that the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts
will be filled with God's strength and redemption
so we can take those things into the world in which we live
and be a blessing there.

So, this morning I hope and pray
that you have experienced yet again
at a deeper level than before
the glory of God
that is the source of our strength and redemption,
experienced it so deeply that you can live it more fully.

