

Glory Ps 148 (Natural world) / Isaiah 6 : 1 – 4 / Rom 15 : 1-7

‘Brian, will you please go and tidy that ‘glory hole’ of a bedroom of yours.....’ was an instruction occasionally heard in the Lock family household and I don’t think that the word ‘glory’ was being used in a particularly positive sense.

I suspect that glory is one of those words we use without really considering the meaning. Like many of you I spent time back at the start of Lockdown watching nature unfurl, seeing the fells magnificent against a blue sky – glorious was a word often in my mind and on my lips. My thoughts wondered to the Creator and if there was a difference between ‘The glory OF God’ and ‘giving Glory TO God’?

When pondering a meaning I tend to first head to the dictionary – As a Noun words like:-

honour, high renown won by notable achievements,

praise and worship, thanksgiving offered to God,

magnificence, great beauty, the splendour and bliss of heaven (a spiritual dimension of great joy and happiness.)

As a more mundane technicality – the halo depicted around the head of Christ or a saint in art.

As a verb a hint of a warning – ‘to glory in’, to take pride in, even boast of achievements.

Other expressions in addition to my mother’s ‘glory hole’ popped up, glory days – even ‘glory box’ apparently an antipodean expression referring to that collection of items a wife-to-be makes in preparation for her new life.

Taking away some of the human limitations and devaluation of the word we start to get a sense of what glory, with reference to God, might be. Looking at God with awe, a fit response feels beyond us, limited by our own nature and lack of experience. But how to actually go about glorifying God, praising, worshiping and being thankful in a sufficiently honouring way?

The Old Testament, I recall, describes lots of close encounters with God. We heard one from Isaiah read earlier. Others include Moses meeting with God up a cloud shrouded mountain. Ezekiel had an experience of God he described in terms of extreme natural phenomena and extraordinary mystical creatures. Meanwhile for Elijah God dispensed with the storms and earthquakes and came in the quiet – perhaps unnatural quiet - like we have experienced in lockdown. These all seem like fantastical, out of our world, science fiction writings.

The translator’s root word for glory is associated with weight and heaviness, of worth and worthiness. This comes through with the instructions associated with the places the Israelites would create for God to inhabit, the Tabernacle for the days in the desert and once settled, the Temple in Jerusalem. The architect’s work sheets specify the best of scarce materials, the most skilful craftsman giving of their best.

Moving into the New Testament we still see some of the fantastical events associated with God’s Glory. The announcement to the shepherds of the birth of Jesus, the Transfiguration witnessed by Peter, James and John, even post resurrection Deacon Steven saw the glory of heaven as he was stoned to death.

BUT – it is as if in a new dimension with Christ’s presence on earth – The writer of the letter to the Hebrews 1:3a says,

‘He (Jesus) is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.’

By meeting a person – we can begin to observe a character, a reputation. By seeing God reflected in Jesus we have a sense of the presence and the character of God. The ministry of Jesus, his death on the Cross, resurrection and return to his Father are spoken of by Jesus (John 12:27,28)

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”`

The great achievements (thinking back to those words associated with the definition of glory) - the achievements of crucifixion and resurrection we can count as ‘honour, high renown won by notable achievements’ and some thanksgiving by us is justified.

But Jesus returned to His Father – so where does that leave us post-Ascension? In 2 Cor 3 we read,

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

So where does this rapid skim through bits of the Bible leave us with understanding of ‘The Glory of God’, and of ‘giving Glory to God’?

I suggest that the ‘incredibleness’ of the ‘design’ we see in the natural world, that tingle sensation we get of seeing, or being involved in the creation of something of beauty, which perhaps spans many people and many ages – those good things in tune with the character and purposes of God, that are bigger than any ONE of us, all speak of God’s glory.

More directly we see God’s glory in His generous acts of creation, the undeserved gift of forgiveness through the death of Jesus, the opportunity to understand more of God through the time Jesus spent living on this earth. Yet more, the defying of all natural law and raising Jesus from the dead, and the gifting of the Holy Spirit to those wishing to be close to God.

The Jews believed that God inhabited the inner courts of the temple, as Christians we believe that God’s living Spirit resides in our heart. The symbolism of the curtain that separate that inner court being torn just as Jesus died is that intimate experience of the Glory of God was no longer restricted to a specially chosen few but is available to all who seek it.

We both reflect the glory OF God and give glory TO Him in the way we live, offering the best of ourselves as individuals and as Christian communities – one way that those who do not know God can see Him.

Finally a challenge – When Moses came down the mountain after meeting with God – God’s glory reflected in, through him so much that the Israelites insist that he cover his face - as if to dim down God. I wonder if we choose to metaphorically cover our own faces, restrict what of God is seen through us, either by personal decision or by pressure from those around us and consequently deprive the world from seeing God in all His Glory

I pray that we may all be transformed from one degree to another higher degree of glory.

Amen.