

## Sermon: Glimpses of Glory

Lord of glory, infinite and brilliant beyond our imagining, share with us more of the fullness of your life, that as we glimpse your wonder we may grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Is 6:1-10 . Mark 9:2-9

I got into a fight last year. It was a public, and very polite scrap, in the pages of the Methodist newspaper Touchstone. Letters flew thick and fast for a while there in response to a rather stropy controversial letter I wrote critiquing the theology of the Methodist church expressed at the Conference we held here in Palmerston North the previous November. It was all fairly entertaining, but there were big issues at stake. I was criticising the tendency to reduce God down to one defining characteristic and action – “love.” Please don’t get me wrong, God IS love, and God’s love is utterly vital – but not so vital that all other aspects of God fall away. God’s love comes wrapped up with God’s power, or it is impotent to save. God’s love comes illuminated with God’s glory, or it is a tame love, too much like our own.

Anyway, that’s what I was arguing about; some Christians are uncomfortable with ideas of power and glory, rejecting them as masculine, militaristic, or just really old fashioned. It matters to those who are more, shall we say ‘rational’ in their faith, that God fits with their convictions about reality; they argue that miracles and supernatural power have been displaced by science and that God only operates within the laws of nature, through human action and the created world, loving and serving through human love and service. If that is your conviction then I do respect that and as I said last week I will not belittle that. But I might also argue with it, because the God I believe in is bigger than that; my God is also a God of majesty and wonder, miracles and presence.

It is a missional question also – what place is there in our culture in 2012 for ‘otherworldly’ spiritual ideas like glory and holiness? Are these barriers for non-Christians to engage with the faith? Or are they powerful and important points of resonance with basic human needs?

Goodness me, enough of the heavy theological debate, that’s not really where I want to go this morning. Our two Bible readings today invite us into God’s very presence; they are glimpses of glory. We have Isaiah’s incredible vision of heaven with angels zooming all over the place and throne and temple, robe, smoke, shaking, fire, endless songs of Holy Holy. Wow.

Then we have Jesus and his mates perched among the rocks, puffs of clouds wafting past, the countryside falling away below them, and suddenly Jesus is hurting their eyes with a brilliant light, and then before you know it there’s their great heros Moses & Elijah, chatting away to Jesus, and then there’s the voice booming in their heads. Wow.

You know, some people just love this stuff, and others are like, well, maybe it didn't really happen like that, doesn't matter to me. Some people have experienced for themselves divine brilliance in a vivid way, but for most of us it's a 2ndhand thing, or maybe a warm glow sometimes.

So my question for you this morning is, what's the closest you get to visions of glory? Are you someone who gets taken out of yourself by a beautiful sunset, the moon soaring in a purple sky? Do you need stillness and quiet? Or words, conversation, scripture? Do you love to sing, does music soar you to heaven? Or do you touch wonder more in little things, a flower, a hug, the smell of coffee?

***How does God reveal his glory to you?***

I'm fascinated by your conversations here. I'm fascinated by how we struggled to find words for this kind of stuff. In fact, that's by definition a part of it – spirituality involves those experiences which stretch our language to breaking point.

I am fascinated also by the diversity of our experiences of God. I am convinced that God is pouring out himself on all people all of the time, and just sometimes each of us is for some reason open enough, quiet enough, desperate enough, to notice. Everyone experiences the divine during their life, but most do not know how to understand it, and so can simply forget

I am fascinated by how glory is for us defined in a particular way, by Jesus Christ and his walk to the cross. Most religions honour God's brilliance and otherly wonder. Only ours grounds this in love-in-action in God's holiness in the midst of torture & death.

Eucharist, Communion holds these together; in the broken bread and wine poured out we enter into the death of Jesus, even as we celebrate his glory and majesty.

And most of all I am fascinated by how glory changes us. Worship shapes us. Non-Christians are afraid of this word 'worship', afraid of being mushed into some mindless mass hysteria. Perhaps they are right to be nervous about worship, because it does affect you, does change you.

If you are entirely comfortable with who you are and how your life is, I would warn you not to come to worship. Because when you enter through those doors you willingly enter a place in which the living God is free to change you ... to make you bit by bit more like his son Jesus. And he does this by giving us glimpses of his glory. That's what worship is.

That's what Holy Communion is. Us sitting in a little puddle of light that shines from heaven into the darkness and confusion of our lives, letting his light bathe over us, letting his love warm us, more and more, down to our cold toes, letting him bring us more and more alive!

What I am going to do now is instead of continuing with a sermon in the normal kind of way we are together going to begin the process of responding to God's glory in worship, as we share together in Communion. And as we do each step together I am going to offer a short reflection.

We are so familiar with the words of Holy Communion, but I would like us today to be especially aware of how each of the aspects of this is a response to God, it's us giving permission to God to change us as we worship him. "Bring it on, god!"

So if you will bear with me ... for those of you who like structure, I have 6 steps, 6 movements of the heart and mind, that lead us through Communion.

The first we have already begun. It is simply to worship, to offer our thanks and praise, to gaze upon the living Lord.

As Isaiah did in his vision of God on the throne, as the angels do constantly, as the disciples did seeing Jesus in his glory, we simply stop and let God be God.

The traditional Mass expressed this in the words of the Gloria

I invite you to sit and pray for a moment, as I read the Gloria

(Liz play quietly)

Prayer Book 405

Isaiah experienced the glory of God in a vision, and his first reaction was one that we too share – "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Woe is me. God's brightness intensifies our shadows.

God's brilliance shocks our complacency.

What we put up with everyday, our ambivalence and muddling along, our petty frustrations and compromises, stand out startly against the light.

God calls us to repentance.

And so confession is step two on our journey to Communion.

The Latin mass, with its roots back into the very early church, includes the great cry of the heart

Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy

Christe eleison, Christ have mercy, Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy

I invite you now to confess your sins to the Lord, and to accept God's enthusiastic forgiveness.

...

Prayer Book 407

Absolution, p.408

The third step on our path this morning is one of offering.

This is the great statement made by Isaiah, made by millions of others who encounter the living Lord, confess their weakness and offer their lives to him ... 'Here I am'

That's it. It is really very simple. Here I am. It's not waving at the Lord, trying to catch his eye, waving our lives in the air hoping he'll notice us. It's just being, now, right now, here. Standing, turning out our pockets. What you see is what you get, Lord. This is me. This is it. Take it or leave it.

My invitation to you this morning as we sing our song of offering, as you place of gift of money in the bowl or honour what you are giving through other means, is that you offer your whole self to God, holding nothing back. In trust. In love.

And we also bring forward the elements of communion, symbols of what we each bring, here and now, in worship.

OFFERING

Song: *I Stand in Awe*

So, step number four, is where we look around us and realise it's not just about me. A vital part of our response to God's glory, our desire for Communion, is being in relationship, being part of the body of Christ, his people. And you are here because you belong here, in the Milson Combined Church. And we here are surrounded by countless hosts of witnesses, those gone before, those yet to come, the angels, the saints, our fellow Christians in churches and homes and slums and cathedrals and prisons throughout the world.

That image of Moses and Elijah standing talking with Jesus represents this for me, also – that the disciples were not alone with Jesus. So we are not alone.

And because of this, our relationships with each other matter. Any conflict between us matters. We come into Communion with Christ together, not alone, and so together we need to come in peace. And so, we offer each other the sign of peace.

The peace of Christ be always with you.

**And also with you.** *(share the peace)*

And we are ready now to pick up our familiar words of Holy Communion. These echo around again our themes of praise for God's glory, honour for God's holiness, and also of confession and offering. Then the words of the Great Thanksgiving lead us into remembering, as we tell again the story of Jesus, of the night before he died, of bread and wine and what it means for us.

And as we do this, as we say again these familiar words, our prayer and trust is that Jesus Christ himself will meet us, in his glory and his suffering, in the bread and wine we eat, through his Spirit present, through our fellowship with each other. God's glory rests here, on us. Thanks be to God. This is step 5. Communion.

This is where we hear for ourselves the voice of God, as on the mountain, "This is my son, my beloved." This is true for you and me also today, Hear God whisper to you, "You are my child, my son, my daughter, my beloved child." This is Communion.

E te Whanau, we are the Body of Christ.

**By one Spirit we were baptised in to one Body.**

Keep the unity of The Spirit in the bond of peace.

**Amen. We are bound by the love of Christ.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to The Lord.**

Let us give thanks to The Lord our God.

**It is right to offer thanks and praise.**

It is right indeed, ever living God, to give thanks and praise through Christ, Your only Son.

You are the source of all life and goodness;

through Your eternal Word You have created all things from the beginning.

When we sinned and turned away You called us back to Yourself and gave Your Son to share our human nature.

On the cross, He made the one perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world.

Therefore, we proclaim Your great and glorious Name saying ...

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts,**

**The whole earth is full of Your glory.**

**Glory be to You, Lord, most high.**

With all Your people in heaven and on earth we give You thanks, holy Father, for Jesus Christ, who on the night He was betrayed took bread, and giving thanks to God, broke it and said:

"This is My Body which is broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of Me."

In the same way, after supper, He took the cup and said:  
"This is the new covenant in My Blood.  
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of Me."

... and together we pray ...

**We do not come to Your table, Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Your great mercy. We are not worthy even to gather the crumbs from under Your table, but You are the same Lord, whose nature is always to have mercy. So grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat this Bread and drink this Wine that Christ may evermore dwell in us and we in Him, amen**

The Bread which we break is a sharing in The Body of Christ.  
The cup of blessing for which we give thanks is a sharing in The Blood of Christ. Draw near and receive The Body and The Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ in remembrance that He died for us.  
Let us feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

### **COMMUNION**

I said there were 6 steps, so we have one more to make.  
Jesus' friends were delighted, even in their terror, to have Elijah and Moses, honoured guests, to see the majesty of Jesus. Their response? "Let's build tents". Let's set up camp here. Let's stay here.  
But instead Jesus leads them back down the mountain.  
Just as Isaiah is sent out, so are we sent out. God's word to Isaiah and to us is, "Who will go for me? Who shall I send?"  
Places of glory and communion are not places to stay in for long. They are to fuel us for the journey. Glory lingers around us like a fragrance, but its purpose is mission, its life-blood is found in our everyday lives.

And so I send you out – we send each other out. To live God's glory, to be people of holiness, to love as we have been loved.

We pray together ...

**Almighty God, giver of all good things,  
we thank You for feeding us with the spiritual food of the precious Body and Blood of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
We thank You for Your care and love in assuring us of Your gift of eternal life and uniting us with the company of all faithful people.  
And so we offer ourselves, all that we have and are, to serve You faithfully in the world, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, to Whom with You and The Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, now and forever.**

**AMEN.**

Hymn: Holy, holy, holy 529