

Glorify: Sermon by Silvia Purdie, Cashmere Presbyterian Church 20 August 2017
Readings:

John 1:9-18 John 17:1-8

In my last couple of sermons on the gospel of John my main point was that John uses the simplest of language to convey the deepest of truth. We talked about the basic, easy to understand words, like send and receive, like darkness and light. For this, my final sermon in our series on John, I am choosing what I think is the hardest word in John: Glory. It is not a big word, just 4 letters in Greek. Doxa, where we get our Latin word Doxology. But this little word is really a very big word, for it is a word for the biggest of bigness, bigger than what our human minds can conceive or contain.

I have this week completed a major project, which is reworking all 150 Psalms into versions for children. And the word 'glory' is the darndest thing to try to translate for kids. As I wrote in the one we had as our Call to Worship this morning, the Bible has these words, like Glory, Majesty, Magnify, Worship, and Praise. But what do these mean? What do these ask of us?

And here we run into trouble. because Kiwi culture is allergic to praise. We see images on TV of adoring crowds cheering anything their president says and we are, like, **really!**? Our politicians are lucky to get a polite applause, certainly no adulation and swooning in the aisles. We much prefer bringing our politicians down, and we've had our fill of that in the last month.

We're better at praising our sporting heroes, and we in Christchurch are proud of our rugby team this month. The most excited I have ever seen kiwis was when we first won the America's Cup back in 1995 I worked in inner city wellington and the streets were packed with colour and cheers and praise and honour as the team came through town. It was incredible. And very very rare in New Zealand. This is probably as close as we come to glory.

We aren't keen on praise. We're not that good at giving it or receiving it. "Yeah good on ya mate" is as much as we're OK with.

And we are deeply suspicious of people who expect the praise or demand it.

So giving God praise, celebrating God's glory, just doesn't come naturally to us.

We'd rather be understated, cautious, contained.

So, that's what we bring to this discussion about Glory.

Let's turn to what John brings to this conversation. What does the gospel of John say about glory, the glory of God? What might he mean when he uses the word, this small 4-letter word with a big meaning? What does this have to do with Jesus? And what does it have to do with us?

Glory, Doxa, is one of John's favourite words. He uses it right at the beginning of his gospel, and right at the end, and many times inbetween. It comes in two

forms, a noun and a verb: glory, as in the glory of God, the glory belonging to God ... but mostly it is a verb 'glorify', the action of honouring the glory of God, enhancing, adding to, empowering, celebrating.

So what does it mean? *Doxa* in Greek is a translation of *kabad* in Hebrew, meaning originally 'weight'. Perhaps even better than our English word is the Maori word 'mana'. Mana is a person's standing, their reputation. Just like in Isaiah's vision in which he saw the robe of God filling the temple as a metaphor for glory, in Maori culture the cloak, the korowai, is the most tangible expression of mana – a person's esteem is worn like a cloak, a robe, which has a weight to it. Glory also has a sense of shining about it. It also means splendor, brilliance ... like the Alps this week with their mantle of snow, gleaming in the sun.

In the gospel of John glory is a mutual interactive process between God the Father and God the Son. God is glorious, Glory belongs to God, and God glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father.

And there are three ways this happens, three ways in which Jesus Christ enhances the glory, the mana of God and in which Christ is glorified by God.

1: before time. John claims the darndest thing about Jesus, which is that Jesus shared in the being of God from before the foundations of the world. "Before Abraham was, I am" claims Jesus.

As we heard in our reading from chapter 17:

"and now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"

2: in his earthly ministry. John's gospel tells us about what Jesus did: in word and actions. And when Jesus talks about glory he says:

"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4)

The work Jesus did was the words that he spoke, the truth that he taught, the lives that he touched, the actions that he did, which John describes as signs of his glory.

3: in his death and resurrection. John's gospel leads us through to the crucifixion of Christ. And Jesus himself talks about his coming death in John, in terms of glory expressed in "the hour"

In chapter 12 Jesus says:

"Now my soul is troubled. but 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." ... Jesus said: 31 "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12:27-33)

When I read that verse again this week I realized, hey that's a pun! It's not a joke but it is a pointed double meaning. Jesus is glorified as he is lifted up. Glorify means to lift up, to honour, to raise above all else.

But as John points out, Jesus was 'lifted up' in a way that seemed to deny glory, Jesus was 'lifted up' in the worst possible way, the ugliest way, on the cross.

This phrase, 'lifted up' opens up for us what glory means in the gospel of John. For it means both the splendor and abundance and spiritual awe that is the very being of God most High. And it means the cross. Which is the ultimate expression of the glory of God. Which makes no sense, which sounds like a contradiction in terms. How can glory be revealed through the ugly? How can splendor be expressed through suffering?

Listen to the answer:

John 17:26, the end and climax of Jesus' great prayer to the Father:

"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known, so that your love for me may be in them and that I may be in them."

The answer is love.

To be honest, this wasn't quite what I was expecting when I began this word study of glory in John's gospel. I was thinking more in terms of the supernatural, the holy, ultimate reality beyond our human existence. But again and again John points us to love. And John claims over and over that the sharing of the Father and the Son in intimate loving mutual upbuilding flows to us, into our lives, and finds expression in our communities.

After the Last Supper Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ... 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:31-35)

Which gets us to the fourth way in which God is glorified, according to John's gospel. – but wait, there's more!

John 7:39 Jesus promises the Holy Spirit but as John comments:

"as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

As Christ is glorified, by being lifted up on the cross and lifted up in resurrection, God sends the Holy Spirit to those who believe. And through the Holy Spirit we ordinary human beings get to continue the work of Christ, continue to give glory to God, not by seeking an other-worldly spirituality but through loving one another.

So, 4 ways in which God is glorified:

first, with Christ before the creation of the universe

second, by Christ in what he said and did in the three years of his active ministry

third, by the death and resurrection of Christ, which John describes as Jesus being 'lifted up', both in terms of raised into heavenly glory and in the sense of hanging on the cross.

and 4th, in the lives of ordinary Christian men and women, with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The very last reference to glory is Jesus giving Peter a glimpse into how he would die (John 21:19) bracing him for a life of sacrificial service ending in brutal death, which would give glory to God.

Some things have become more clear to me from my word study and overview of John's Gospel through this lens

- a) It is clear that no amount of study and analysis will ever resolve the mystery and complexity of meaning in John's Gospel. It is truly inspired by the Spirit, it is truly living Word, and so its truth will always pull us beyond ourselves and our understandings. There will always be so much more to grasp
- b) It is clear that John packs layers of meaning into his words, especially into this word, glory. It blew me away to begin to unpack this.
- c) It is clear that John's theology is relational all the way. The fascinating thing about his use of the word glory is that it is never static or singular, it is always an action of love, an outpouring of one person into another, of one person of the Trinity into another, and an outpouring of God-ness into us even in our human-ness.
- d) It is clear that glory is inextricably linked to suffering. We cannot have light and heaven and splendor without pain and sacrifice. This is the heart of the Gospel, that Christ died for us. This is the heart of Christian ethics, that we are called to give our lives for others.
- e) And finally, it is abundantly clear that love is the source and love is the outcome of who God is. Glory does not lead us away from the messiness of human relating, but deeply into love. This is the glory of God, that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are alive in our loving.

We might wish for more abstract, more pure and heavenly glory. But this is what the Gospel of John gives us. This is what we mean when we say "Glory be to God". So what do you think? Can we celebrate this kind of glory? Can we praise and lift up our own lives and our own hearts to give honour, to give glory to this kind of God?

I hope that even we reserved praise-shy kiwis might be able to manage that.