

## **Sermon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 5, June 6, 2021, Jane A. Beebe**

“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Over the past year we have worshipped using the liturgy of Morning Prayer many times. After the prayers and collects we say the General Thanksgiving together. It is a beautiful prayer that weaves together all that we are given in a life lived to God. We pray “above all” for God’s “immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ...” Then we go on to give thanks for two more gifts: “the means of grace” and “the hope of glory.” What is the hope of glory? The lovely traditional language that moves so easily on our tongues conceals a startling truth. This glory is certainly our end. However, the resurrection promises more: we can catch glimpses of God’s glory in the here and now wherever we see new life emerging.

How do we participate in God’s glory? One wonderful way we do this is through our prayer and worship. God is always present among us; we acknowledge this with intention through our liturgy. As Paul tells the Corinthians, grace increases thanksgiving—which is to the glory of God. Yet Paul tells us that this prepares us, “...For an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.” I was particularly struck by Paul’s description of glory as having *weight*. We may have

had experiences of being overwhelmed by God's presence in our lives. It can bring us to our knees.

I have a memory of a wedding I attended of a man, no longer young, who had been widowed twice. He and his wife-to-be accompanied one another down the aisle. He was so joyful that he could not stop sobbing. Having known the weight of grief, his joy was almost more than he could express. The weight of glory surely comes from the weight of the cross. Jesus tells us that if we want to be his followers, we must take up our crosses daily. (Luke 9:23) Yet there is the hope that whatever weight we carry, even when it seems beyond us, will be transformed into the weight of glory.

“This, for Paul, is glory. Glory, for Paul, is not mere praise, or radiance, or honor, or fame, or fortune, or patronage, or Adam's lost overcoat.”<sup>1</sup> Glory has to do with God's very presence in the world, a presence we can see. For Paul, this has been realized in Jesus' resurrection. “This is a revelation of divine presence that disrupts all that has gone before, that raises the dead, and that forever changes the lives of those who participate in glory.”<sup>2</sup>

Several years ago a friend described a time in her life that she could only characterize as a “dark night of the soul.” God may seem distant or hidden. Usually

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<sup>1</sup> Newman, “Paul on Christ and Glory,” 409.

<sup>2</sup> Newman, 409.

when one goes through such a time, there is a continued desire to pray even though our prayers may not seem to reach towards anything. Faith is stretched to its breaking point, yet is still alive in us. *We look for what cannot be seen.* The reality is, God may be more present than ever. We wait with patience to be able to bear a new weight of glory.

For my friend this experience took place during Lent. During the first service of Easter that she attended—I think it may have been a sunrise service of the Easter Vigil—she saw that the sanctuary cross was glowing as if edged with flame. All of her spiritual anguish was lifted from her. Perhaps the Altar Guild had done a particularly wonderful polishing job. I think she beheld God’s glory. Having endured a time of darkness, Christ’s light shone out the brighter for her.

Paul says, “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Corinthians 5:1) When Moses led the people through the wilderness, worship took place in tents, and the Ark of the Covenant was also sheltered in a tent called a tabernacle. The temple “made with hands” came later. In both structures God would make his presence known in pillars of cloud, one of many manifestations of God’s glory described in the Hebrew Bible.

The reserved Sacrament is kept in a small cabinet in the church sanctuary, and is called a tabernacle. It is helpful I think to have these visible representations

of God's abiding presence. Yet we can think of ourselves as tabernacles, as moveable tents where God's presence may also reside. We may not always be aware of this presence within as God's glory—much less think of ourselves as glorious—yet it is here, in our hearts where this daily renewal takes place.

More often we may receive God's glory incrementally, however sweetly it may come to us. "Do not lose heart." These are kind, pastoral words from Paul. Recently I told my spiritual director that I had gone from having hope that I would have hope, to actually having hope. This was not a state of mind I could summon on my own. Sometimes prayer seemed dry or fruitless. Yet from Paul we have the promise that our minds will be renewed daily. That in itself is reassuring. As Jesus tells us, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4) According to the Gospel of John, Jesus himself comes to us as the Word. This is a gentle, healing presence that we all need: the daily bread that sustains us in body, mind, and spirit.

Two years ago the wetland near where I live was visited by an egret. It is a striking white bird with a large wingspan like a heron. I reflected on how bird flight demonstrates faith as it spreads its wings and allows the air to carry it. Last year I felt wistful because I did not see such a bird again—although I kept looking. On my last day on Cape Cod last week, I took a farewell walk in the Wildlife Sanctuary in South Wellfleet, a favorite haunt of mine. I was almost at the end of

the trail before coming upon the nature center again when something caught my eye on a small pond. It was an egret. This bird was much smaller than the one I had seen before. Even so I was delighted to see it. There was something in its smallness, its delicacy that breathed out hope to me.