

Akron Christian Reformed Church

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Isaiah 62.1-5; 1 Corinthians 12.1-11; John 2.1-11

Prayer: Help us to follow the signs to your glory dear Lord, so we may experience your presence and find hope in this world. Amen.

One of the major themes of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is the glory of God. In the very first chapter John makes the bold statement:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his **glory**,  
the **glory** of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

1.14

Now, to most of us, the concept of the “glory of God” is unfamiliar and odd. We don’t quite understand what John’s talking about.

Unfortunately, since we’re not first century Jews some of John’s implications are missed by us. But remember another biblical story. It’s the story of Moses being alone on Mount Sinai with the LORD God. And Moses is so overwhelmed by this intimacy with God, that he demands of God: “*Show me your glory.*” (Ex 33.18)

Moses orders God to fully reveal God’s self to him. Don’t hide behind clouds or veils or anything else. “I want to fully know you. I want to intimately know you God. Remove the mystery. *Show me your glory.*”

To which the LORD God says, Moses, “*you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*” (Ex 33.20)

In other words, no human being is able to fully know me. I’m far beyond your understanding. It would kill you if I turned towards you and revealed myself. Instead, instead,

*“I’ll cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I’ll proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I’ll have mercy on whom I’ll have mercy, and I’ll have compassion on whom I’ll have compassion.* (33.19)

So, even the Jews, God’s chosen people, even Moses, only partially know who God is. All they could grasp about God is that God is merciful and compassionate. They only glimpsed the glory of God. They never looked fully upon it. God’s glory is so much greater than mercy and compassion, but it’s too great for Moses to see.

And according to John, all that there was until Jesus is this partial knowledge of God. But with Jesus,

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We’ve seen his **glory**,  
the **glory** of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

1.14

John’s premise in his Gospel is that Jesus reveals the glory of God to us. The very glory that Moses asked to see, Jesus reveals to us.

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We tend to get lost in the wedding of Cana story, in much the same way we do the Jonah and Nineveh story. Our eye is pulled towards Mary and the wine and that becomes our focal point. But John includes this story in his gospel for only one reason. To begin leading us towards recognizing that Jesus is the glory of God. That in Jesus, God is revealed. John says,

*What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (2.11)*

After this, throughout his gospel, John will reveal signs that Jesus truly is the glory of God. And right at the end of his gospel, at least at the end of Jesus' ministry, Jesus last words are found in what's called The High Priestly prayer:

*I've given them the **glory** that you gave me .... I want [them] to see my **glory**,  
the **glory** you've given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.  
(17.22, 24)*

And then Jesus is crucified. Which to John is the culmination of the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. The crucifixion reveals how far God will go for us because God loves us.

NT Wright says:

[The wedding at Cana] is one of only two occasions we meet Jesus' mother in this gospel, the other being at the foot of the cross (chapter 19). This is important because Jesus' strange remark in verse 4, 'My time hasn't come yet'.... [then] at last the time does come, and the glory is revealed fully, as he dies on the cross. That event, for John, is the ultimate moment when heaven and earth meet. That is when it takes all the faith in the world to see the glory hidden in the shame: the creative Word present as a weak, dying human being. (John for Everyone, Part 1, p. 21)

The fact that God will allow God's self to suffer, and die is the heart of the glory of God. The entire Gospel of John is leading us to this understanding. In the crucifixion God's truest, deepest identify is revealed. God's glory is sacrifice. If you want to see the face of God, look at the cross with Jesus hanging on it.

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On Tik Tok a few weeks ago I heard a young woman ridicule all religious faiths, but especially Christianity. And what she finds most disgusting about Christianity is that we're encouraged to sacrifice ourselves for others. To her that's sheer lunacy.

And I get it. In our culture it's difficult to understand that part of being human means that we are sacrificial. If you've never been taught to sacrifice, if you've never observed sacrifice, if you've never benefitted from sacrifice, if you've never discovered a sacrificing God, how would you understand the concept of sacrifice as liberating? How could you see sacrifice as redemptive?

Especially when one of the great problems is that the church, the visible body of Christ, the best reflection of the glory of God, is so incredibly broken. God's message of grace and sacrifice is obscured by the church's obsession with rules, and judgment, and wealth, and power, and division.

Nonetheless, in the world right now, the best reflection of the sacrificial glory of God is found in us, God's shattered mirrors.

Maybe, if you're unfamiliar with the benefit of sacrifice, and if you're willing to look real hard, maybe one may discern God's glory in us, but it's not easy.

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The wedding at Cana isn't a story that simply illustrates that Jesus is powerful. It's pointing beyond itself. It's pointing already to the Last Supper, to the death of Jesus, and to the resurrection. It's not an accident that it's wine that's created. Nor is it an accident that John begins this whole story with the words: "*On the third day.*" (2.1) Those words have no meaning except as a sign that points to the resurrection that occurred on the third day. (If you count the days this is actually the fifth day.)

Which is all fine and good, but what power do these signs have for us today? After all, we're surrounded, surrounded by signs that point to the power of sin in our world. I started to list several examples, but I don't need to. We all hear the stories of sin that surround us. We all hear the stories about war and the great suffering that refugees all around the world are enduring every single day with very little hope for the future being better. We all see the news filled with murder and crime. We witness the power of sin.

These signs *of evil* are sometimes so powerful and overwhelming that they threaten to blind us to the subtle signs of God's glory. The signs that point to how imperfect this world is, often seem more real than the small, gentle sign of turning water into wine.

And yet that's what God gives us. That's what God uses to build our faith. That's the first piece of evidence that Jesus is the glory of God.

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Look, the church is created for three things. 1. To celebrate the sacraments. 2. To proclaim the gospel. 3. To care for the weak. Those are the quiet signs that the church uses to point towards the glory of God, a glory defined by mercy and compassion.

I can't quite fathom why so much of the church minimizes the signs of God's grace. Why aren't those three things the very definition of being the church for every church?

Why isn't every church celebrating the Lord's Supper every single week? It's a powerful sign that points to God's grace. And only the church has this sign. It can't be found anywhere else in the world. Why is it disrespected so much, especially in the Evangelical churches?

Why aren't we participating in baptism every week? I've been wondering about that. At the monastery the most moving service is Compline and at the end of that service we walk past the abbot, and he sprinkles the holy water of the baptismal font on every one of us – Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Atheist alike. It's a sign of our forgiveness and it's a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. I'm working out how we could incorporate that kind of sprinkling into our worship as well.

Why isn't every church proclaiming a gospel of mercy and love and compassion? Pointing towards the glory of God found in Jesus.

Why isn't every church upset by the suffering of refugees and the poor and the oppressed around the world and close at home? Why do some churches despise the people with the greatest need?

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The church isn't about entertaining ourselves. It isn't about protecting our children in sanitized youth groups. It isn't about creating a social club where we may remain with those who are like ourselves. It isn't about completing some moral obligation, so we don't go to hell. The church isn't about proclaiming the seven habits of highly successful marriages. It isn't about exercising to contemporary Christian music. It isn't about how to force God to make you wealthy. It isn't about supporting the civil religion of the nation.

No. The church is about the sacraments, the proclamation, the care of the weak. In those three things we quietly discover the glory of God.

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I couldn't quite bare another Sunday without communion. So, I've set it up again. But it's going to be different. We will read the liturgy and then you will come up front and take a piece of bread, that I've already torn, and take a shot glass of juice or wine. There's no order, no lines, no circles, simply

come when you want to. Willy Nilly. But please keep your distance from one another. Just back off, whether you think that makes any sense or not. Don't crowd. We're not in a hurry.

And I'll be over there at the Christ candle. If you want to be blessed, and you're not afraid of being close to me, then come over and I will bless you.

Our signs are not loud or flashy, but they're what we have, and in them we're directed towards the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.