

Unveiling Glory 10-6-24

Have any of you ever been on top of a 14-thousand-foot mountain peak? Climbing “fourteeners” is a common form of recreation where I came from in Colorado, since our backyard was full of them. One year we packed up my preteen daughters, along with some of my wrangling staff in the middle of the night and hiked one of these peaks. Most of us acclimated to the dark and hiked by moonlight. When we got to the summit, the dawn was just beginning to break, but we’d been in pitch darkness for hours, so our visibility was limited to within a few feet around us. As the light began to push back the darkness, the vista began to take shape. When you’re up that high, you’re looking down on everything else. And as the sun lifted, the layers of mountains around us illuminated with the myriad colors of the sunrise. What had been black and gray in the preceding hours, became a symphony of radiant colors. It was stunning. It’s interesting how you can be standing in the middle of such extraordinary beauty and be completely incapable of seeing it.

When Jesus came to this earth, he came as the image of the invisible God. We live in God’s world. Everything we see bears witness to God, testifying to God’s glory. We humans are all made in God’s image. The fingerprints of God are everywhere, and yet, as often as not, we are blind to God’s presence. Jesus came as the sunshine to illuminate God for us, to highlight what we couldn’t understand, to communicate God in a more tangible way.

Today’s lesson from John chapter 17 comes from what is known as The High Priestly Prayer. Jesus had just finished the last supper with his disciples, and he was praying, moments before being betrayed and hung on a cross. It was the last recorded request Jesus makes of God in John’s gospel. And it is on our behalf. In his last quiet moments alone with God, Jesus prayed for us. He asked for two things to accomplish a single purpose. The two things he asked God for were: to protect us from the evil one and for God to sanctify us in truth. The purpose of the requests was so that we all may be unified. As

Jesus prepared to suffer and die, he was concerned for our unity, knowing that the enemy would attack our sanctification into oneness.

These are big concepts; our coffee shop conversations don't typically include topics like attacks from the evil one or words like sanctification. But there were central to Jesus in his last moments and so they must concern us as well.

If Jesus wants us to be sanctified, what exactly is sanctification? The technical definition is to make something holy. It's like consecration; like what priests do to the bread and wine at the Eucharist. It's the process of setting something apart; highlighting its distinction from the mundane, pointing out that there is more to the thing than what can be seen with the naked eye; namely God's presence. Remember the sunrise on top of the peak. The mountain range below was always there. We needed the light to be able to see it. Sanctification is that sunlight, pushing away the darkness preventing our ability to see.

What is interesting about sanctification as Jesus uses it, is that it presupposes our holiness. When Jesus says we do not belong to this world, the original language actually says we are not from this world, we do not come out of it. We are otherworldly. We are of God, made in God's image, derived from God's own self. This holy, otherworldly fiber is typically shrouded by a lot of sin, but underneath the world's stains exists holy framework. Sanctification, therefore, is the process of uncovering, unearthing...if you will, the substance of God's image stamped on each one of us. Jesus' prayer was that God would shine such a powerful light on us that we would be able to see in ourselves and one another, this holy bedrock that is the people of God. Ultimately Jesus knew that when we recognize this holiness, we will be transformed by it to such a degree that the world would also see it and also be transformed. The more that any one of us looks like Jesus, the more we look like God. And the more we look like God, the more the world is transformed back

into who and what we were originally designed to be. ***Sanctification is our participation with this process.

Our coffee shop conversations may never use the word sanctification, but perhaps they should include more about the ways we are participating in this work of unearthing the divine in ourselves and one another?

Jesus indicated the way into sanctification is truth from God's word. Whenever the New Testament speaks of these things, it is vital to remember it is not talking about the Bible. That may be included, but they did not have the Bible when this was written. For Jesus, our sanctification happens when we pay attention to the communication of God, and that communication comes from many places. Jesus wants us to pray, to read the sacred writings, to both speak and listen to one another because we all have the capacity to become the mouthpiece of God, the voice of truth, as we are increasingly sanctified.

And let us not forget about the second request Jesus made of God, to protect us from the evil one. Regardless of the image elicited in your mind when I mention the evil one, Jesus recognized this sinister force as one that destroys the work of God. Jesus' prayer indicates that the world's ability to recognize God's glory would come from our unity. The purpose of his requests to God were to ensure our unity. So, we can identify the works of the evil one as anything that threatens our unity.

We face things that threaten our unity all the time. When was the last time any one of us got upset, hurt, frustrated, etc... by someone and our internal response was to either lash out at them or quietly leave, creating as much distance as possible? What might happen to our growth in Christ, our sanctification, if we identified those responses in ourselves as the enemy himself threatening to divide us? That image that popped up in the imagination

when Jesus referenced “the evil one”... what if we saw that sinister image in our minds whenever we wanted to throw up our hands and be done with humans altogether? Would it change our behavior to think that way? Jesus sure understood it that way.

On the other hand, our Scriptures offer us a glimpse into what this sanctified life **can** look like. Isaiah’s imagery conjures a path called the Holy Way where everyone supports everyone else in experiencing the glory of God with their whole selves; eyes, ears, restored bodies, and tongues all sing praises to God. And David’s Song of Ascent pictures the same thing in the city of Jerusalem when all the people of God purpose together to seek peace and goodness for one another. Now is perhaps as poignant a moment as ever for us to feel the devastation that comes to God’s own cherished land when people oppose one another. Perhaps that is why Paul implores us to maintain the unity of the Spirit and names peace as a bond.

According to C.S. Lewis... “You have never talked to a mere mortal.... Next to the blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” If we see each other the way Jesus does, if we recognize the divine DNA in ourselves and our fellows, how might it change the way we act towards one another? If we purposed to live each day with the expectation that God has something to communicate to us and to seek it out, how might that change the places our minds drifted throughout the day? If we made it our aim to participate with God in our sanctification, in turning the lights up, what might we see? What might the world see?