

Sermon The Glory of God Revealed
1 Kings 8:1,6,10-11,22-30, 41-43
August 23, 2009
The Rev. Shelby Owen at Trinity Church

The “Glory of the Lord.” We hear that phrase so much in our regular worship. In an average Eucharist service we might hear the word “glory” as it is applied to God between 10-15 times, and yet how many of us really know what the *glory of the Lord* means in its full sense? In our reading from 1Kings this morning we hear Solomon speaking and praying at the dedication of the Temple. The elders are gathered together in Jerusalem and they have brought up the ark of the covenant to the Temple, and it rests in the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. And as the ark is put in place, the priests come out of this most holy place in the Temple and a cloud fills the house of the Lord; the scripture says, **“for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”** This cloud, a visible manifestation of God’s glory, symbolized the presence of God in the Temple. The reading even says that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud. Now that is one powerful expression of glory! The kind that stops ministers dead in their tracks, the kind that prevents people from going about their business, the kind that awakens a sense of wonder and awe.

This idea of the cloud symbolizing God’s presence was not a new concept for the Israelites. When they escaped Pharaoh in Egypt, God led them through the desert by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and later when the tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that went with the Israelites while they wandered through the desert, was covered by a cloud, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever that happened, Moses was not able to enter into it and the people had to stay put until the cloud lifted. The cloud was visible to all, a reminder of God’s presence as they tried to find their way. And yet, again the glory of the Lord was cause for the people of God to be still, to pause, to look with awe at the brilliance, the grandeur, the honor of God.

Author Frederick Buechner says that “glory is to God what style is to an artist. A painting by Vermeer, a sonnet by Donne, a Mozart aria---(or I might add windows by Tiffany)each is so rich with the style of the one who made it that to the connoisseur it couldn’t have been made by anybody else, and the effect is staggering.” In essence observing the style of the artist brings you about as close as you can get to the artist without actually being with him/her in person. Buechner says “to behold *God’s* glory is the closest you can get to him this side of paradise, just as to read *King Lear* is the closest you can get to Shakespeare.”(or going to the Blackfriars.)

In response to witnessing God’s glory, King Solomon proceeds to speak, to bless God for God has fulfilled his promise that Solomon would build a house for the name of the Lord, and then the king prays. And as Solomon prays asking God’s blessing upon the Temple, as he pleads for God to hear the cry of anyone both Israelite and foreigner when they pray in or toward the Temple, he vocalizes that God’s dwelling place is not just in the Temple: “Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house I have built!” Solomon in essence is saying that God cannot be manipulated or

contained within human constructs. Solomon seems to understand that God's rule is not limited to any one place—here on earth or in heaven. And yet, we see here as Solomon has prayerfully created space dedicated to God, God's glory has filled that space in a visible and magnificent way. So even though God cannot be contained, he does indeed make himself known here on earth.

If we look forward from Solomon's day several hundred years, our New Testament gives us the sacred story of the birth of Jesus as a new manifestation of God's glory. The gospel writer John writes at the beginning of his gospel, "and the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his *glory*..." In Jesus we have God's presence in the flesh. In Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection we will see the living presence of God known in God's efforts to save us from ourselves, to give us hope, to bring us to a new life of abundance. God's glory is revealed in the face of the Christ Jesus, the one who suffered and died for us, that we might become whole. Later the apostle Paul refers to the *church* itself as God's Temple (1Cor.3:16-17), "Do you not know that you are God's Temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?" As believers we are part of the body of Christ, part of God's Temple, part of God's dwelling place.

How do we see God's glory revealed today? Through whom and through what can God's glory be seen? Words can only begin to describe it. Words and experience though can at least give us an impressionistic picture. One of the things I have enjoyed about my new job here at Trinity is the number of people we have coming through here during the week just to see THE WINDOWS. My old habits working for Colonial Williamsburg as a history interpreter so long ago resurface when I happen to be the one leading window visitors over to the church and letting them in. We usually come through the back door and we usually keep most of the lights off so the outside light shines through the windows. I am always honored to be with people when they first walk into this place, when they first come around the corner and when they first see the beauty of this room, beauty that takes our breath away, beauty that stops many of us in our tracks, especially when we are seeing it for the first time, beauty that makes us linger, beauty that awakens in us a sense of wonder and awe. God's glory is also revealed sometimes through music such as we have at our service this morning or the Staunton Music Festival which is taking place throughout this week. Sometimes we feel that brilliance and splendor of God in nature such as when the clouds are very dark and the sun peaks around the corner or in the words of poetry when we sense that the divine has pierced our heart through a few choice words.

In referring to our being channels of God's glory, author Henri Nouwen says, "Action is doing it yourself; passion is letting yourself be emptied out so that the glory of God can be revealed in you." In other words we must leave room in ourselves and be open to God's glory, to have the humility to recognize and to be receptive to the God who is and the God who wants to be known. Sometimes the glory of God is revealed in us when we can make room in our lives such as through prayer or through the Eucharist, to allow God into the picture. Perhaps it is God's glory when we can stop long enough in our conversation that our words would be words of healing rather than words of hurt or woe, God's glory when we have found ourselves forgiven and loved when we think we

are deserving of wrath and indignation, God's glory revealed to us when we see the face of a loved one who accepts us foibles and all, even in the death of a friend, in the birth of a baby. We know it when we see it; we feel it, we sense the presence of God around and in us. Can we attune our hearts and minds to the glory of God in our midst- in the faces of one another, in beauty, in acts of mercy and kindness and forgiveness?

I venture to say that it is in our desire to behold God's glory that we gather together each week to worship him. Could it really be that God's spirit dwells in us, that he would make us instruments of his glory and that he would allow us to behold his glory if we empty ourselves enough to make room for it? We are the body of Christ and God's Temples and we can be the channels of the glory of God as members of that body. May we keep our hearts and minds open to what God can do for us, to what God can do through us and for what God can do in us. May we behold God's glory that we be as close to him as we can be this side of paradise.

Amen.