

Acts 1.6-14; 1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11; John 17.1-11

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the light took on a mellow, buttery gleam, as it painted the sky golden. Streaks of pink and orange appeared, and the movement of the clouds looked like a kaleidoscope, shimmering and glowing like fabulous cotton candy as the world turned.

The thunderstorm crashed above, lightning splitting the sky into jigsaw pieces as thunder roared above the pounding rain. Everything else was drowned out in the splendour of the storm.

A tiny flower peeked through a crack in the concrete, a joyful note of blue beauty, perfect in form, asking to be admired in its audacity for springing up unlooked for.

The breeze whispered of God. For a minute, the divine felt tangible. Your breath was God's breath, and a sense of grace infused everything.

I wonder if you can think of a time when you experienced a moment of glory? Something that took your breath away, or made you stop and marvel, something awesome and beautiful. Small glimpses of glory pop up every now and then, and make us pause in the business and routine of our lives. Glory is something that stops us in our tracks, and we know we have to dwell in it, in that moment. When we find it, we have to allow ourselves to be submerged into it while it lasts.

Biblical scholar Dr Paula Gooder talks about glory in her book 'Everyday God', and reflects that even though they aren't common, we sometimes catch glimpses of true glory throughout our lives. When we do, it's tempting to try to force it to be prolonged. Just like the apostle Peter on the mountain at the transfiguration, offering to build tents so that they can all stay there and extend the moment of wonder. Our instinct is often to want to hold onto it, to sustain or catch it somehow. But when we watch a magnificent sunset, we know there is no clinging to it. We simply have to inhabit the moment and appreciate, bask in it, revel in its breathtaking beauty, while we can. And there's something about its fleeting nature that makes the moment of glory even more marvellous. I've often thought this about the things we treasure in life. If they really did last forever, they would not be so precious. The very fact that everything is finite forces us to appreciate what we have, and to be more attuned to those snippets of awe in their rarity.

In our gospel reading today Jesus speaks a lot about glory. The context is the last supper. It is the Thursday evening and the disciples are all still sitting with him around the table. The passover meal is drawing to a close, and he has been talking to them about what is going to happen, that he will be betrayed. Then, Jesus starts praying this prayer, the disciples listening, hearing him speak of being glorified by God, asking for a restoration of what was his before coming into the world.

Now the definition of glory is: high renown or honour. Great splendour or beauty, and magnificence.

But the glory that Jesus is talking about is almost beyond our comprehension. It's a glory of heaven, of God, of the divine. It's more magnificent than anything we've ever experienced. It is what Jesus left behind in order to be incarnated, and what he returns to at the ascension. And yet somehow, we are woven into it. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are drawn into the splendour of God, made part of the heavenly wonder.

It often might not feel like it. Life is hard and messy and full of the unexpected. When we think about all the problems in our city, our country, the fact that so many go without their basic needs being met, that there is war and struggle across the world, the idea of being drawn into God's glory may seem absurd. When we think of the suffering we experience for ourselves or see in our close friends and family, glory is far from our minds. But Jesus knows what is coming. Judas has left the room to go and betray him, and death is around the corner. Yet his prayer is full of acknowledgement of God's glory.

Because here's the point - the glory of the Lord is God's presence. John's gospel can be hard to understand, with the language being very flowery and convoluted, but the essence of it all is that God created all things in unity with Jesus, and Jesus came to model that unity to us, and to draw us into it alongside him. While we won't see its fullness until we are completely united with God in heaven, we sometimes catch glimpses of it along our way. The disciples see an unusual amount of it - they see the ascension itself, with Jesus taken up before their eyes, but through the gift of the Spirit we are all part of the glory of God's presence.

The 1st letter of Peter spells it out for us, as he writes that, 'the spirit of glory, which is the spirit of God, is resting on you'. Jesus has returned to the Father, returned to the full glory of being united, but the glory also remains with us, carrying on as a foretaste of what is to come. Now, instead of Jesus, people have to look elsewhere to see God's presence. And do you know where they see it? In us. Through us. Since the ascension, glorifying God happens wherever and whenever we reveal God's love to the world.

We might see those glimpses ourselves at different times and in different ways. Perhaps for some of us they are very rare. Perhaps you find moments of God more often. But however you experience glory, know that it also dwells within you. It isn't something that can be held onto, we can't force it or manufacture it, but we can seek it, and it rests upon us, breaking out at times to demonstrate to others that God is still at work in the world.

Paula Gooder writes "we are to be ready to recognize the glimpse for what it is when we see it, to drink it in with all that we have, to savour it and then to go on living our normal lives; lives that now will be both the same as ever and transformed utterly by what we have seen and experienced."

Glory, which is to say, the presence of God, does not leave things just as they were before, but somehow changed. Somehow we are changed, we become more of what we are, bearers of the Spirit. We are people of glory.

Jesus' ascension did more than return him to heaven. It bestowed on us the greatest wondrous gift. For you are now the bringer of God's presence. You are the carrier of the divine, the one who reveals to the world the message of Christ. You are part of that unity which speaks of love, catching, showing, reflecting, glimpses of pure love into the world. May we be so transformed, bearers of glory in a world which so needs it.

Amen.