

Psalm 8 ~ Romans 5:1-5

Sharing the Glory

Trinity Sunday/Ordination & Installation of Officers/Father's Day

June 16, 2019

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Introduction to scripture – For Mature Audiences only...

We are about to hear a snippet from what well may have been the last letter in our Bible that the Apostle Paul wrote. This one was addressed to the church in Rome in 58 CE. They were struggling to expand their understanding of God to be as inclusive as the poetry of Psalm 8 suggests. Those crowns of glory and honor are for all, that means everyone: Jews and Gentiles, "Us" and "Not Us." Access to God's grace, God's love is our birthright. Living into this truth requires a maturity of spirit which we hope to grow toward. If you listen closely to these five verses, you will hear the first whispers of Paul's expanding understanding of God's nature to include God as creator of love, who became love in Christ, and nurtures love within us. Something we Christians would come to call the Trinity.

Sermon

"The wait is over. I can't believe it. This is not a dream. This is real life St. Louis." Yes! On June 12, the St. Louis Blues hockey team defeated the Boston Bruins, 4-1 in Game 7, to win their first ever Stanley Cup. How long had they been trying? Since 1967. That's over fifty years. Ten years longer than the Biblical definition of a long time which is forty years. Until last Wednesday, St. Louis Blues fans were among the roster of longest suffering: which included Chicago Cubs fans until the World Series win of 2016, the Seattle Mariners fans who have the longest streak without postseason play, and the Buffalo Bills fans with their four straight Super Bowl losses.¹ As I heard one Blues fan exclaim on the radio after their Stanley Cup victory, "This doesn't happen! I can't believe it."

"Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see *the glory of God*?" Jesus posed this question to skeptical Martha as they stood together at the entrance of her brother Lazarus' tomb, a cave with a stone lying against it. He had already been dead for four days. And Jesus had just told them to "Take away the stone." To which Martha responded, pointing out the obvious, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days." She was horrified at what they would smell and see if they opened the tomb. It would be disgusting and embarrassing for

Lazarus and for Jesus. It would be anything but, *the glory of God*. And yet, as we know from the story in John 11, Lazarus, the dead man came out from his tomb, alive and walking on his own, standing before Jesus in front of the astonished mourners. He had died four days ago. This doesn't happen. They could hardly believe it.ⁱⁱ

Alongside the stories of the St. Louis Blues stunning upset and Jesus raising the 4-day dead Lazarus, I will add just one more: the story of our patriarch, "Father Abraham." This third seemingly impossible scenario comes straight from the tap root of our biblical heritage, one we share with Jews and Muslims. An especially appropriate one to remember here on Father's Day. Talk about long waits and impossible odds—what was God thinking when God called Abraham to become the father of our faith? As Paul put it in Romans 4, "Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb (Rom 4:18-19). Abraham's life long wait ended at the impossible, laughable birth of Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac.

Our God likes long odds, apparently. Maybe that's how God gets our attention: the glory of God shining through in the most unlikely places and at the oddest times. Did you notice that strange v.2 of Psalm 8, the first Psalm of praise in our whole Book of Psalms? "Out of the mouths of babes and infants, you have founded a bulwark... to silence the enemy and the avenger." How can a helpless, totally dependent infant possibly be the one to overpower the enemy? Perhaps in the same way one dark-skinned Jewish carpenter from small-town Nazareth could also be God with us who came to earth to save us all. Our God whose love for all of humankind would lead him to suffer and die on a cross. No one was laughing that day. The day the glory of God was hanging on a cross.

From death, God brings resurrection. From hopelessness, God brings new life, new healing for us and for this world Christ came to save. For this, God birthed the church on the Day of Pentecost with wind and fire, as Janet Wolfe preached last Sunday. And now, I'm sure that you can't believe it, but your year-long wait for Trinity Sunday, is over! Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost have their thrills, but surely Trinity Sunday tops them all. You don't agree with me? Believe it or not, as

Christians, this is our jam! As Sarah Moore-Nokes preached in her sermon two weeks ago titled, “What Does it Mean to Be a Presbyterian,” we don’t get excited about or hang our hat on a single interpretation of scripture or doctrine, as Presbyterians. But we *do* get excited about the glory of God made known to us in Christ, the Word made flesh; and we are thrilled by the Holy spirit being poured into our hearts. It’s so deep that any words we try to use, fall short. We know God when we experience Divine Love, because, as it is written in 1 John 4:17: God **is** love.

God, who created us for love, became love made visible in Jesus, and nurtures love in us and through us. We embrace these three aspects of God’s nature, acknowledging they can never be contained or fully described with just three names or attributes or God, or even with three hundred words. But we believe all three are equal in power and glory. There is no hierarchy, order or ranking of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Along with this radical equality, these three aspects we call the Trinity, tell us that God’s very essence and nature is relational. That is the glory and the mystery of God. No one understands the Trinity completely because God is beyond us and our imagination. Let’s be thankful for the parts we *do* understand. Maybe if we renamed Trinity Sunday, “Glory of God” Sunday, we’d have more takers. I hear God calling us, as the Body of Christ we call FPC to do everything in our power, to share the glory of God. We will be surprised where we find it.

I learned recently from a current member the surprising way she saw the glory of God at a time when our church was between pastors and in a tender spot, several years ago. As the adults were struggling to find the way forward, it was our children’s choir, those young voices giving their best to sing of God’s love and power that was exactly what this family needed to experience God’s glory. Truly it was the glory of God in our children’s choir that brought this family to us and this family closer to God.

I will share one final story of where we might find God’s glory-- even in an old, half-blind dog, as told by Professor Annette Brownlee, of Toronto, Canada. She writes, “I realize now that I once saw God’s glory in the strangest place: in an old, half-blind dog. I had parishioners in a long-standing Bible study who found it almost impossible to love each other. They’d known each other for years. Once was a cranky, opinionated elderly woman who had been a nurse, and the others

were an equally opinionated, somewhat inflexible couple, both doctors. There were at odds on everything: politics, the church, health care—all of which came out in the Bible study. Toward the end of her life, the elderly woman grew too weak to care for her dog. Her daughter couldn't take him. She was distraught. This couple, who had sparred with her for so long, took her dog. They care for it for the rest of its life. Each time I saw that dog, well-fed and groomed—each time I saw how happy that dog made them—I think I saw God's glory. Why? Remember the promise Jesus makes to Martha when she tells him her brother, Lazarus, is dead? "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40) This couple knew they were bound to this difficult woman in Christ. They knew that death didn't get them off the hook. We didn't do so well with getting along they told me, but here they were still bound to this difficult woman through her old, half-blind dog. And loving him." ⁱⁱⁱ

Perhaps you dragged in here this morning burdened by a person, a relationship, or a situation that seems hopeless. Or maybe you are burdened by the direction our country and our world are heading—politically, socially, or ecologically. The challenges we face are legion. Yet, we have the St. Louis Blues, Lazarus, Abraham and Sarah, our children's choir, the old half-blind dog and most of all, we have Christ. Christ who is God with us, God in us, God on the move through us. Yes, God busting to share the glory here and everywhere. Believe it: the more we share the glory, the more God's Glory can happen here.

ⁱ Victor Mather, May 8, 2019, *New York Times*.

ⁱⁱ Annette Brownlee, "Preaching Jesus Christ Today," *Journal for Preachers*, Pentecost 2019, p.22-25 provided the idea for this paragraph.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, p.24.