

## Meadowbrook Congregational church

### “Glory”

May 16, 2010

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#### **John 17:20-26**

*20 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

*25 'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'*

Christian story teller Anthony De Mello tells the story of an oil well that caught fire. The oil company called in experts to put out the blaze. But the heat was so intense that these firefighters could not get near the blazing rig. In desperation, the management called the local volunteer fire department, to help in any way they could. About thirty minutes later a decrepit-looking fire truck rolled down the road at a high rate of speed, drove past the gathered crowd at the safe distance point, and then came to an abrupt stop just fifty feet away from the flames. The men jumped out of the truck, sprayed one another, and then went on to put out the fire. Those in the crowd were amazed at the courage of these amateur firefighters. In gratitude, the oil company held a special ceremony later than week, to honor the courage of these local volunteers. An enormous check was presented to the chief of the department. When asked by reporters what he planned to do with the check the chief replied, “Well, the first thing I’m going to do is take that fire truck to a garage and have the darned brakes repaired!”

I thought about this little tale as I considered the words of the Scripture lesson this week. The words of the gospel of John are taken from Jesus’ farewell discourse, his solemn prayer for his disciples and for all those who would follow him. Our lesson today is roughly one-third of that prayer, with each year of the preaching lectionary given a part for us to reflect upon. Jesus has shared a meal with his disciples. He has spoken of the upcoming hour of his conflict. He has addressed the moment, giving significance to the time and action in which he followers were living. And now he raises his eyes and hands in prayer. In a sense, this is the real Lord’s Prayer, the prayer in which Jesus actually prays for us! Jesus gives thanks for the glory of God that has

been manifested in him and gives those who would follow him guidance as to how to live in God's glory in the future.

Jonathan Holston writes of his recent visit to a local bookstore. He experienced something of a revelation there. It seems that the largest section of the store was the self-help section. There was something there from belief to baking, from finding friends to developing faith, from romance to every diet every conceived, from exercise of all shapes to dressing for success as to create a new you. It is clear that people are looking for guidance in many places. Jesus sensed that such questions would abound among those who journey through life. What shall we do now? Where shall we go? What is the right thing to do? What is the wise thing? And so Jesus prays for us. He prays that we might come to understand our purpose. He prays that we might believe. He prays that the glory given to him might be now passed on to us.

This is where things get a little confusing. Jesus speaks of glory. Glory can be defined as "splendid greatness." We tend to think of it in very human terms. Glory is praise and honor. It is success and attention. It is looking good in front of others. We've all known "glory seekers," those whose purpose seems to be in standing out from the crowd. I heard a routine the other day where comedian Brian Regan talks of "me monsters," people who dominate conversations with talk that points only to themselves and their special nature. Regan says these are the people who interrupt your story of having two wisdom teeth pulled by telling you that they have had four wisdom teeth pulled, all impacted. He finishes his routine by saying the only people who can talk about themselves without being "me monsters" are the twelve men who actually walked on the moon. They have something to talk about!

Yet the picture of glory Jesus paints isn't the kind of glory we might expect or desire for ourselves. Jesus isn't talking about ticker-tape parades, medal ceremonies, newspaper headlines, or ESPN end-of-game highlight heroics. He wasn't emphasizing the glory of victory, of power, or of accomplishment. Jesus isn't even speaking about turning water into wine, calming a storm at sea or restoring sight to the blind. He points to something less obvious, something he would experience: the cross, his death, and the true glory of God. And he said that his followers would find the same kind of glory when they follow his path in service.

Jesus speaks of glory as the way in which we are united with him and with one another. Glory is grounded in what God has in mind for us and our acceptance of that purpose in our mind. Glory is found in our letting go of ourselves and our worries and our agenda and letting God move in our plan, letting God inhabit our thoughts and actions, letting God shine through our words and our deeds.

Biblical scholar William Barclay defines Jesus' glory in this way. It is suffering in love for the sake of others. It is obeying God, out of the love of God. It is in acting so people can see God when they see you. It is in speaking so people can hear God when they hear you. Jesus believed that his glory came when he manifested God in all things. Jesus believed our glory would come when we were one with him, offering to others in our lives, the glory of God.

It strikes me that the church is a pretty good incubator of Jesus' promise glory. It perhaps might not be our intention and certainly isn't what we want. But it is a place where our worldly expectations of glory intersect with Jesus' own interpretation of the kind of glory his believers would experience. We come to this place with perhaps clear

expectations on what needs to be done in our life and our world. We come here seeking worship that will inspire and help us transcend our worldly experience. We come here seeking places to serve in meaningful ways. We come perhaps, seeking others who think as we do and to believe as we do and to make us feel good about ourselves in all things.

Yet that is seldom what we experience. The community of faith, Christ's body in the world is full of demands that leave us with little sense of completion. Those who serve sometimes receive more headaches and heartbreaks than fanfare. There is often too much to do and too little time to do it. Everyone seems to have a different view, which is especially frightening when seeking consensus. And in the ministry of the church, seeds are planted but sometimes those who sow the seed do not get to see them grow.

I recall reading an article in *Sports Illustrated* about a successful baseball player. He was asked about the moment when he first realized that he was actually in the major leagues. He talked about walking into the clubhouse. He talked about putting on the uniform. He talked about running onto the field in front of thousands of fans. He talked about seeing his picture on the scoreboard and hearing his name announced through the speakers. But yet he said that his realization that he had reached his dreams came during his first major league at bat. Growing up he had always dreamed of that moment, standing at the plate, perhaps hitting the first pitch thrown to him over the fence for a home run and then rounding the bases to the triumphant cheers of fans, reaching home plate where he would receive the accolades of his teammates. However as he stepped into the batter's box for that first at bat, he looked down at his third base coach. He received the bunt sign. He had to bunt. He had to intentionally make an out, to sacrifice himself to move his fellow teammates along the basepaths. And that is when he knew he was in the major leagues- when his success was measured not by home runs but by successful sacrifice bunts.

In his sermon entitled *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis wrote about the meaning of the glory that Jesus defines. He said that "the proper rewards are not tacked onto the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation." In other words, glory is not found in the successful completion of the task but in the doing of the task itself. As much as we would like it, glory as a follower of God doesn't mean clear choices, winning solutions, constant affection of others and comfort in living. It is more of an ambiguous thing, a harder choice, and a more thankless task of sacrifice.

Perhaps that is what Jesus was praying for all along. May we find glory in the reality of our everyday walk of faith. May we find it in the twists and turns of our journey. May we find it when we serve, when we suffer, when we sacrifice, and even when we fall short of our expectations. Glory will come not in immediate satisfaction, but in knowing that God is with us in all things and that all we do in Christ's name will further God's glory and ours.