**Becoming the Glory**

Psalm 68:4-10, 32-35
John 17:1-11

The darkness was our friend. It was a big disappointment when a sales person talked my grandfather into installing a huge yard light on our family farm. We loved going out into the dark at night, especially when the moon was only a sliver and the light came only from the twinkling of stars. It was better yet when clouds blanketed the sky keeping even the light of stars from penetrating our darkness. On those nights you could walk outside, put your hand directly in front of your face and be unable to see your fingers. That is darkness.

 The darker it was the better for one of our favorite games, flashlight tag. I am sure you know how it’s played. The person with the flashlight counts to ten while all the rest of us would run and hide. We hid behind trees, in the ditch, the back side of the house. If you were touched by the light, you were out. Sometimes we would have a great hiding spot. Other times we would scurry around the house, trying to avoid being seen. All of that changed when my grandfather decided to purchase a big yard light, making it impossible to find a secure place in the darkness.

 As children we never associated the light from our flashlights with a religious sounding word like glory. All we wanted to do was have fun. But, in our Gospel lesson today, light and glory are almost synonymous. The tension has been mounting, the conflict with religious and political authorities growing in intensity. Yet, rather than hide from the troubles ahead Jesus offers a prayer for all to hear, “glorify your Son so that the son may glorify you”. Another way of saying it is let the light of your love shine on me that I may shine a light on your love. This is the glory Jesus is speaking about, God’s love and justice made flesh, for all to see.

 What makes this passage about glory particularly unnerving is that Jesus goes onto say it is our calling as a community of faith to glorify Jesus. It is our calling in other words to let the light of God’s love revealed in Jesus shine through us. This capacity to glorify God, this capacity to shine a light on God’s love, is what Jesus calls eternal life. For the early community to whom John’s Gospel is written, the eternal love and justice of God stands in sharp contrast with the claims of the Roman Empire to be the eternal city.

 In many respects Rome saw itself as that big yard light, it overpowers the darkness with its might and force. Rome claims and demands that it be glorified. We see this dynamic playing out today wherever empires exist. It is among the reason Americans sometimes lay claim to what is called exceptionalism. Everyone else must live by certain international standards, except the U.S who is free to use drones or whatever technology we might have, wherever we deem necessary, because we are exceptional. We expect and demand the glory that comes from being the big yard light.

The church at times has succumbed to this yard light understanding of what it means to share in the glory of God. Unable to see the light in other people, we have treated them as if they had no light to share at all. We know this was true for Indigenous peoples in this country, who by law were prohibited from practicing their religion until 1978. This yard light approach to other religious traditions, denying their capacity to be bearers of light is equally true in many other parts of the world as well, and often is at the core of anti-Islamic rhetoric.

We are mindful as well how the language of light and darkness has too often become code language for racial hierarchy, privileging those who are light and denying the humanity of those who are darker. We glorify one culture and diminish another because we have associated lightness with good and darkness with bad.

 We have reason to be suspicious and cautious about religious rhetoric that glorifies God, glorifies Jesus and in the process glorifies us. But, Jesus turns this misuse of glory on its head when he says, glory is about living faithfully to the work God has given us, serving as agents of God’s love and justice. There is no need to be a big yard light. According to Jesus we can be a source of God’s glory even in the worst of situations, the most difficult and painful of times. All we need is the small light of a flash light. No matter how tough life gets, nothing can keep us from letting the light of God’s love and justice shine through our lives. In our Gospel today, Jesus prays, “Father, the hour has come, glorify your son so that your son may glorify you.” One does not need to be a biblical scholar to recognize that whenever John speaks about “the hour” John is talking about the crucifixion of Jesus. John tells us it is Jesus expectation that even in what looks like loss and utter defeat, the love of God’s love and justice can shine through. Whenever and wherever love shines through, even on the brutality of the cross, God is glorified.

 You, no doubt, are aware that this week we lost a wonderful light in our world. Maya Angelou, poet, author, dancer, artist passed away at the age of 86. She never sought to be a yard light as if her light was the only light that might exist. She carried a flashlight and that flashlight was enough to make a difference in our world. To be sure as she matured and more and more people became aware of her gifts, the flash light she carried may have been a bit bigger than most. But, it was a flashlight all the same.

 This past week she was scheduled to receive a Beacon of Light award from Major League Baseball. She had been ill and new she would be unable to attend so she taped her remarks. She died just before the award was to be given. Major League Baseball nonetheless made the award and broadcast her remarks. Maya said, *“There are none so blind as those who will not see. There are people who go through life burdened by ignorance because they refuse to see. When they do not recognize the truth that they belong to their community and their community belongs to them, it is because they refuse to see. When they do not accept their oneness with their fellow man and fellow woman, it is because they refuse to see. When they choose to live sheltered in their own personal universes, oblivious to the plights that face our brothers and sisters and their brother and sisters, it is because they refuse to see to see what is in front of them.* Maya’s words reminds us that the yard light of self-glorification, the yard light of exceptionalism, can blind us to the light of God’s love.

 The glory of God has nothing to do with one person being better than another, one religion being better than another, one nation being better than another, even one understanding of who God is being better than another. God is glorified, Jesus is glorified, we are glorified when in concrete ways we live out the love and justice of God. It is almost to impossible to miss in John what Celtic Christians readily embraced, the encircling participatory nature of God’s love and glory.

 If you have been at church after the sun has gone down, you may have noticed a small light on the post near the door by my office. It is a solar powered light and it illuminates a box with handouts about Cherokee Park United Church and solar energy. It is only a small light and yet it carries a powerful message about the difference we can make as a community of faith. This is what it means to bring glory to God, living our lives in faithfulness to the love and justice of God as a community, as individuals. When we show care for one another we glorify God. When members were here yesterday setting up for the meal we soon share, we glorify God. When we offer forgiveness to someone who has offended us or seek forgiveness we glorify God. When we cut our neighbor’s grass we glorify God. When we stand up for someone being bullied or speak out against injustice we glorify God. There is no need to act like a big yard light, pushing back all the darkness. The darkness can be our friend. All we need is a little light to let the love and justice of God’s love shine through. It is in sharing God’s love that we become the glory of God.

**Psalm 68:4-10, 32-35**

*In our first lesson the Psalmist gives praise and glory to God. Yet as the Psalmist sings a song of praise it is abundantly clear that the God glorified by the Psalmist with praise is a God whose love is made know in care for those who suffer, the poor, the widow, those who are desolate and those in need.*

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is the Lord— be exultant before him. Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land.  O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness ,the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished; your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy. Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord, O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies.  Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people.  Blessed be God!

**John 17:1-11**

*Our Gospel lesson today takes form of a public prayer offered by Jesus. Jesus begins by acknowledging “the hour” the time of trial when he faces the brutality of Rome is at hand. Yet, even as Jesus anticipates what lies ahead he is confident that even in the face of great suffering we can bring glory to the love and justice of God.*

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in

your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."