

27 May 2018
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Our Glorious, Glorifying God”

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; Acts 2:14a, 22-36; John 3:1-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity.
Let us give glory to him because he is glorious.*

[Pause]

Oh, wait . . . that’s not what we said, is it? What we sang earlier, in the Introit. But it’s how we think. How we’ve been trained to think. Give glory to the glorious. The athlete who is at the top of his game. The celebrity with all the awards. The best-selling author. The mega-billionaire with all the cars and houses. The celebrity pastor who’s always on TV. The inventor of the latest hot app or viral video. These are the people who get invited to the White House, who go to royal weddings, who get to sit at the head table, who don’t have to wait in lines like the rest of us. These are the people - let’s be honest - we want to be around. Because maybe some of their glory will rub off on us. And maybe we’ll be considered glorious, too.

Because you know what’s not glorious? Cleaning up your child’s vomit, or changing her diapers. Holding the hand of an old person who doesn’t even know you’re there, or who will soon forget. Struggling to pay your bills. Doing the laundry. Cleaning bathrooms. Being stuck in a dead end job. Driving a car that still has a tape deck in it! (Some of you probably don’t even know what that is!) Or how about this: worshipping in a rented, non-descript building instead of a beautiful church with stained-glass windows and a pipe organ . . . and being happy to be back! Again - let’s be honest - wouldn’t you like to jettison all that *and be glorious*? And not have to worry and bother with all the rest? Most of us, I think, would take it in a heartbeat. It’d be like winning the lottery - another glorious thing we often dream about.

So why doesn’t God just give it to us? All this stuff, this glorious stuff? That’s what a lot of people wonder, and ask. If God is glorious, as we claim He is, as we heard today from Isaiah that He is, why doesn’t He make you glorious, too? And if He doesn’t . . . well, that must mean your God isn’t very glorious after all, or that He can’t do it, or won’t - that He must not like you very much. Either way, that’s not a God I want to believe in. And so some walk away from such a life, such a church, such a God. And so are we

tempted as well.

But here's the thing: God *is* glorious, and He *does* give His glory to you. He does want you with Him so that His glory *will* rub off on you. Just so. The problem, you see, is not with God, but with us. It's that we don't understand what glory really is, and what it means to be glorious.

So this is what we *actually* sang, to teach us about that:

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity.

Let us give glory to him because he has shown his mercy to us.

So on this Holy Trinity Sunday, that's what we celebrate. Not just who God is - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *God in three persons, blessed trinity* (LSB #507) as we sang at the beginning of the service today - but who He is *for us*. What He has done for us. Because you cannot separate the two and get either one right. We cannot know God apart from what He does for us. And what He does for us is really who He is. And if this is what God is doing for us, then it is glorious. And we can begin to know what glory really is, and is really all about.

So the Creed we speak on this day, you know, the really long one . . . the Athanasian Creed, which we'll speak right after this sermon, that's what this Creed does. First it tells us who God is. All that stuff about the Trinity, and it kind of makes your head swim, right? Trying to understand about how there is only one God, but He is in three persons. And that these three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while all being God are really only one God. *Whaaaaaat?* But then we get toward the end, and we start talking about Jesus. We start talking about what this God has done for us. And we're at home. We're comfortable. We get it. This is who God is because this is what God has done for us. And it is glorious.

Isaiah, though, he had a first-half Athanasian Creed moment. He saw God in His unveiled glory, *apart* from His work for us, and so He was beyond terrified. He said ***I am lost***. I'm dead. He could not really know God this way. God, this way, is dangerous . . . *until* He did something. Until God had one of His angels, called a seraph, take a coal from the altar, a coal from a sacrifice, and touch it to Isaiah's lips. And with that touch, cleanse and forgive Isaiah. What God did for Him then completely changed Isaiah, as He went from scared stiff to eager beaver. ***Here am I! Send me!***

On the other hand were the people to whom Peter preached on Pentecost - the people who heard his sermon that we heard in the Epistle. They saw the work of God for them, even had a hand in it, putting Jesus on the cross. But they didn't know who God really is, so they didn't know that this man they put on the cross was God in the flesh. And so they didn't understand what it meant. And so Peter preached it to them. Showed them from the Old Testament prophecies that this is what God had said He would do all along. Because

this is who He is: a loving God, a serving God, a merciful God, who is all these things **for sinners like us**.

And when He is all those things for sinners like us, when He most showed His love and mercy, well . . . it didn't look very glorious at all. It was pain. It was blood. It was rejection. It was gory.

And there, in the midst of all that, we learn what glory really is all about. And it's not about the White House, royal weddings, or head tables. It's really about loving and serving and mercy. God's for you and yours for others.

I think that's what Nicodemus had to learn. At least, one of the things he had to learn. He came to Jesus at night, looking for some glorious teaching because he had seen some glorious signs. And so Jesus gives it to him - but he is utterly confounded because he didn't really know God and so he didn't really understand what God was doing. And how God was the one sitting before him and talking to him. He doesn't understand earthly things or heavenly things!

So finally, to teach him, Jesus points him to the time when Israel was in the wilderness - a most unglorious time in Israel's history! And when Israel was in the wilderness, as Nicodemus surely well-knew, God led them those 40 years with a pillar of cloud and fire. And maybe that's what Nicodemus was hoping for now - some kind of big, impressive sign or teaching, like that. But instead Jesus tells him this: *Nope! It's not going to be like that*. Rather, when you see the Son of Man **lifted up** - which meant lifted up on a pole, or on a cross, like the bronze serpent was in the wilderness - when you see that, then you will see God, then you will know God, then you will learn of God. Then you will see how God will give you life. For this is how **God loves the world**, that **He sends His only Son** to do that, for you. That you might not perish, but have eternal life. There is God's glorious working for you.

So if you want some of God's glory to rub off on you, that's where you go; that's where you'll find it. And so to do that, to share His glory with you, God brings His cross to you. And so when you are **born again of water and the Spirit**, you are being gloried. When God sends one of His messengers to **touch your lips** with the sacrifice from the altar of the cross, you are being gloried. When God sends you a preacher to speak His cross to you, you are being gloried. When God tells you **your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for**, you are being gloried. You are being gloried by the glorious work of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - for you. For in all these ways your sins are forgiven. The forgiveness won on the glorious cross given to you here and now, some 2,000 years later.

For this is who God is. The glorier of the glory-less. The strength of the weak. The lover of the unloveable. The forgiver of the guilty. The embracer of the shamed and shunned. So if that's you - and I know that it is, just as it is me - draw near to your glorious God

who is here for you. Draw near in truth. Confessing, repenting, baring your soul - you can't fool Him anyway, and nothing is hidden from His sight. So draw near to Him in the truth of who you are and what you have done, with all your doubts and fears and sins and confusion, and not only let His glory rub off on you, but be washed in it, filled by it, abounding in it, rejoicing in it. For He doesn't have just a little for you, but more than you can imagine. That's why He's here, after all. To be who He is for you. Your loving, serving, merciful God.

But a word of caution here: if God's glory rubs off on you and is poured upon you and into you, then you're going to be glorious not as the world thinks of glory, but with God's kind of glory. His loving, serving, mercying glory. You'll be glorious in all those ways I talked about at the beginning of the sermon - all those things we *thought not* so glorious. Turns out, those things really are quite glorious after all. *God's kind of glory*. Because all those things you do for others, it's what He has done for you. And now is doing for others through you.

So cleaning up your child's vomit, or changing her diapers? That's God, through the mother or father He gave you, or for the children He gave you.

Holding the hand of someone in need? That's God, too. Giving you someone to love or serve, or giving you someone to love and serve you.

Doing the laundry, cleaning bathrooms - yup, that's God, too. Providing for you; using you to provide for others.

Do you get it? When you lay down your life for others, when you love and serve and mercy as He did, that's because His glory - His real glory - has rubbed off on you. Because His forgiveness and love and mercy live in you.

And if you look at your life and see a shortage of these things, and find yourself thinking of that other kind of glory, don't beat yourself up. Jesus already took your beating for you. No, come get what you need. Come get some glorying. Come to where the glory of God is for you. Come to this rented, non-descript building, or to a beautiful church with stained-glass windows and a pipe organ, or to a hospital room with a small group gathered around a small cup and plate. For in those places - in all those places - where His Word is proclaimed and His gifts are given, there is God for you in all His glory. To glory you.

And then on the Last Day, when Jesus comes again, you will be among those who, as we will say in the Creed today, *have done good and will enter into eternal life*. Not because your good things have earned you that - but because your God has glorified you with His glory, and the good that you lived is because of the good you received. From Him. From the glory of the cross in your life.

And then, on that Day, you will get your invitation - not to the White House! That will be long gone. But to a better and greater house. The house of your God and Saviour, and to a feast that will never end.

And the song we sang today will be your song then, too. For it will still be quite true. For the truth is eternal. And so the song we sing today is the song we will sing forever.

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity.

Let us give glory to him because he has shown his mercy to us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.