

## Visions of Glory

Each time we come into this church we are presented with a vision of God's glory. God's glory is a combination of God's splendor, power, love, grace, majestic beauty and transcendence. The beauty of this worship space represents God's glory. When we step inside this holy place, we are pulled from ourselves to God, from this world to heaven, from the past to new, future life.

Br. Mark Brown, a monk at the Society of St John the Evangelist (SSJE), uses the word "threshold" to describe his experience of worship in the monastery's chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Coming into the church one leaves behind one room of our life and stands on the threshold of a new room before us.

He uses the word "liminal" to describe this space. Church can be a place to celebrate transition, moving from old comforts to new possibilities. In worship we are presented with a vision of glory. In word and sacrament, we know God's revealed glory; we are invited into this glory; and we can experience transformation.

I feel this sense of threshold today for many reasons. I was out of town for 5 days and had not participated in the Holy Eucharist for 8 days. It's nice to be home and back at the Altar. This season of Easter is a liturgical celebration of the 40 days the Risen Christ appeared to his disciples. It is a transitional time, a threshold between past and future. Christ's Easter appearances reminded the disciples of the past, but also prepared them for the future. Easter is a season to experience God's glory in the Risen Christ.

Today (at 9 a.m.) we celebrate two wonderful threshold, liminal events: Holy Baptism and the Renewal of Marriage Vows on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peter and Melissa's wedding here at Grace. In baptism, we become new beings in Christ and His Body, the Church. As Peter and Melissa look back with thanksgiving on 25 years of marriage, they also look ahead. I hope they can come back here in another 25 years to celebrate.

Our four scripture readings today present us with visions of glory. They transport us into both the past history of our faith and our current experience of God's glory. The Psalms are expressions of worship, helping us to enter into God's glory. Psalm 148, and the two that follow, bring the Psalms to a close. They are hymns of praise, lifting our hearts and minds into God's transcendent glory.

The Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, brings us into the conflict the early Church faced under persecution from worldly powers. This struggle resulted in great suffering, death and destruction. Christians in every age have read Revelation to find hope, to connect to visions of glory in the darkest of times. The last chapter gives us the vision of "a new heaven and a new earth ... the holy city ..." God with us, defeating evil and death.

Peter's vision, recorded in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, changed the history of our faith. The Spirit told Peter to not make any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Peter, and then Paul, was led to preach, to baptize, to expand the Christian mission, proclaiming, "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life ..." So a small Jewish sect centered in Palestine became a faith that transformed the entire world. Peter's vision of glory leads the Church in every age to new missionary adventures, near and far. We are asked to go to today's "gentiles" and share God's love in Christ.

It seems strange to us on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter to go back to the Last Supper, Judas' betrayal, and Jesus' teaching. Yet for St. John there is no separation in the vision of glory. Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the full sign of glory. The central focus is the Eucharistic teaching of the "new commandment" to "love one another." Jesus told his disciples, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (13:34) This is the essence of Christ's message.

Many of us, most of the time, find it difficult to enter into these visions of glory. If it was not difficult our churches would be filled every Sunday; practices of prayer and worship would be routine and normative. We are inspired by visionaries, mystics, artists who present signs of glory to us and invite us to enter into glory. Yet we wonder about, perhaps even doubt, our ability to see, to understand, to experience.

As a young seminarian 40 years ago, I discovered the writings of Evelyn Underhill. She was born in England in 1875 and as a young woman had a powerful conversion experience. She devoted her life to the study of Christian mystics throughout history; to writing; and to spiritual direction.

In 1915, just as World War I began, she published a book titled, "Practical Mysticism." I love her subtitle, "A little book for normal people." Her dedication page reads "To the Unseen Future." Underhill believed that visions of glory, mysticism was possible for all to experience. She writes, "As the beautiful does not exist for the artist and poet alone ... so the world of Reality exists for all."

The incredible technological visionary Steve Jobs found his way into glory. Jobs died 4 1/2 years ago at the age of 56 after battling cancer for 8 years. I recently read the eulogy his sister gave at his funeral. She talked about his spiritual journey after he was diagnosed, and, then, during his final days. He gave hope and peace to those around him. As he was dying he helped them to see visions of glory.

His sister described his last hours, his last words. (1)

"His breath indicated an arduous journey, some steep path, altitude.

He seemed to be climbing.

But with that will, that work ethic, that strength, there was also sweet Steve's capacity for wonderment, the artist's belief in the ideal, the still more beautiful later.

Steve's final words, hours earlier, were monosyllables, repeated three times.

Before embarking, he'd looked at his sister Patty, then for a long time at his children, then at his life's partner, Laurene, and then over their shoulders past them.

Steve's final words were:

OH WOW. OH WOW. OH WOW."

(1) As quoted by Mark Brown, SSJE in "Give Us A Word "on 4.22.16 from the New York Times original article on 10.30.11.

Acts 11:1-18  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35