

May 4, 2008  
Seventh Sunday of Easter

“The Risk of Glory”

*1 Peter 4:12-19, 5:6-11*

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And*

*“If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

*Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

*John 17:1-11*

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

*“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

Sermon

Believers are indeed a special people in the eyes of God, a people set apart. Our Gospel lesson today makes that very clear. We sing songs like “He’s Got the Whole World in His

Hands” and in Scripture we hear again and again about God’s love for His creation. Yet in John 17 verse nine we have a distinct separation as Jesus prays what we know as His high priestly prayer, *“I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.”* Jesus is here praying for His eleven disciples but several verses later clearly extends this to all believers when He prays, *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”*

And this makes us feel pretty good. We like the concept of being the special people of God whom He chose to receive honor and glory through His son, Jesus Christ. We especially like it because we know we don’t deserve it, that we’ve received this prize only because of Christ’s performance, not our own.

It’s kind of like you or I tried out for American Idol. I don’t watch the show, but you can’t really avoid hearing about it. It is a show where thousands of singers from all over compete until one finally wins the prize of becoming a star. Now unless I’m mistaken it would be a stretch to think of most folks in here winning a contest in a Karaoke bar on a Monday night, much less American Idol. But imagine that every time you or I got up and sang painfully off key, an incredible, awesome and perfect singer chose to come out next and we got to be judged by His performance. In the end we through that performer win the contest and gain the prize.

That’s very similar to how we think about our salvation. Although we as sinners perform poorly in our lives, Christ lived a perfect life. And through faith in His death and resurrection on our behalf we get to be judged as righteous according to His performance, not according to our own. Christ has won the prize of eternal life for us, so we can enjoy living in His glory forever.

However, often we feel the complete fulfillment of that prize should begin here and now. Many Christians believe, and many Preachers teach, that faithfully following Jesus translates into happiness and bliss right here and right now, that the Christian walk is one where everyone you meet is friendly and loving and you will be rescued from every trouble. That’s wrong. In fact in many cases the opposite is true.

My American Idol analogy really breaks down big time after Christ wins the prize for us. Real life Idol winners go on concert tours through New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and Las Vegas where crowds of people love and praise them. If I were to carry out the Christian parallel, we winners would more likely be on a tour through Darfur, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and Indonesia; places where at best folks don’t give a hoot about American Idol and at worst are openly hostile to anything American. The same can be said about how people feel about the Christian faith and those who proclaim it.

There is no crown without the cross. And when we talk about bearing our cross it doesn’t mean bearing the burdens and ills that befall all people in the world. It means bearing the cross of Christ, the cost of proclaiming Christ as our savior. The cross is now and always has been a target for ridicule and scorn. Often times speaking and acting as the people God has chosen to belong to Christ makes you that target. Being the voice of Christ in a sinful world that in no way wants to repent can feel like you’re on stage, singing off-key to an audience that didn’t invite you and doesn’t want to hear you and where the concession stand is running a special on rotten tomatoes. You’re liable to take some hits. But we’re called to keep singing. We’re called to keep sharing Christ no matter what gets thrown at us. That’s why Christ prays that the Father will help us stand fast in His name. When these attacks come not only shouldn’t they surprise us, but we should give glory to God because of them!

*“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you,”* Peter writes. *“But rejoice insofar as you*

*share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."*

Now I know we don't deal well with this. We seek popularity and acceptance. We want others to look up to us. When we face that choice between peacefully going along with the crowd and holding onto worldly esteem or standing out as a target by confessing our faith, we want to take the easier and painless road which keeps us at peace with the world. But we are children of Christ chosen by God. It is precisely in these situations where we have the opportunity to stand and let our faith in Christ shine. *"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."* We are willing to forgo the earthly peace that is not peace at all and stand in conflict with those who mock God because we have been chosen to have real peace, eternal peace with God.

We are called to obey the Gospel of God. We are called to humble ourselves to espouse not those things which glorify ourselves, but we proclaim Christ crucified and point to Him. The consequences of choosing the other road are dire. Peter writes, *"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the Gospel of God?"*

And that's kind of scary, isn't it? It's scary because we can probably all think of times when we've failed to risk proclaiming Christ. We've had those opportunities to take the stage and sing to Christ's glory, but we were afraid and chose instead to sit with the crowd. We didn't proclaim Christ because we were afraid our witness would be shaky and unsteady. We didn't do it because we feared Christ's message would be rebuffed and we would be scorned and even attacked for standing up for our faith. And in the end, while we didn't stand ashamed among the worldly, we do stand ashamed before our God, and that is and feels so much worse.

But we woke up this morning and guess what? We were a baptized child of Christ, chosen by God. The very forgiveness in Christ we may have failed to proclaim in the past forgives us in the present. We don't get just one audition. We get to start with a clear slate every day we go to Christ in faith and repentance and receive forgiveness for our sins. Every day is a fresh chance to go out on that stage which is your Christian life and proclaim Jesus Christ your savior. It is another chance to take that risk, and yes, another chance to share in the suffering of Christ for doing so, and in doing so bring glory to His name.

You may think your voice is shaky. You may think your knowledge of God is weak. The fact is, by earthly measures you may be right. To that guy named Simon who sits next to Paula Abdul, it might not sound so hot. But God isn't using earthly measures. He's using godly measures, and when you proclaim the risen savior in faith, it is a beautiful noise to your God, who at the proper time will exalt and honor you for your faithful witness.

You can't go wrong in proclaiming Christ. If you suffer for it, God is glorified. If your audience accepts your testimony and is brought to faith, God is glorified. The perfect performance has been performed. Christ Jesus was glorified on the cross that you may be glorified in Him. The prize has been won for you and now you bask in and proclaim that glory, no matter what the world may bring. You belong to Christ and are in God, and no matter what the world may make you suffer for Him, Jesus is not letting you go. He prayed thus, *"All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."*

Go out and be the people God has made you. Go ahead and take the risk of living as Christ's children and proclaiming His glory. In the end it is no risk at all. You join in the sufferings of Christ and in doing so join in His glory and He is glorified in you.