

Homily – The Glory of God

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Happy Memorial Day weekend to you all!

Some of you may not know the history of this national holiday, so let me start by sharing that. Decoration Day was created in the late 1860s as a day to decorate the graves of the soldiers, sailors and Marines who had died in action in the American Civil War. By the twentieth century the holiday was broadened to remember all those in the military who had died in any action. And, though it is unofficial, today we seem to also remember or memorialize those in the police and emergency services as well. Memorial Day came out of the Civil War and has continued to be updated to meet the needs of contemporary society.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic also came out of the Civil War. The original words were considered too raunchy for polite American society, so in 1861, Julia Ward Howe rewrote or updated the words. Her song links the judgment of the wicked at the end of the age with the American Civil War, and since its rewrite, it has become an extremely popular and well-known American patriotic song.

Interestingly, the compilers of our most recent Episcopal hymnal felt the Battle Hymn was too warlike, and they eliminated it from our hymnal. Still, I think most of us know it and have some fond memories of it. And, I hope you enjoyed singing it this morning.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:

His truth is marching on.

Glory, Glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

Which finally gets us to today's word of the day.

If you look at the Scripture readings in today's bulletin you will see the word twice, once in the Psalm and once the Gospel reading. And it was one of the first words in our opening hymn. And the first word of our opening anthem. And we sang this word twenty-five times in our sequence hymn.

In the Bible, the word “glory” is used 432 times, and “glorify” is used another 74 times.

We may not use the word very often in our everyday conversations, but it is still very common. So, today I want to talk about the meaning of glory and by extension the “trap” of glory.

Dictionary.com has the following three popular definitions for “glory”.

1. very great praise, honor, or distinction bestowed by common consent for example, to win glory on the field of battle.
2. something that is a source of honor, fame, admiration or pride for example, a sonnet that is one of the glories of English poetry.
3. resplendent beauty or magnificence: for example, the glory of autumn.

Now, in a spiritual context, the word “glory” is used in a much more specific way.

“Glory (from the Latin gloria) is used to describe the manifestation of God's presence as perceived by human beings. Throughout Christian theology, God is regarded as the most glorious being in existence.

And to our benefit, since human beings are created in the Image of God, we can share or participate, imperfectly, in the divine glory. Each and every one of us has Christ in us and around us.

Now, part of the trouble that I have with the word “glory” is that it seems like we should have two different words, and we should reserve one of those words just for when we talk about God. There is a big difference between human glory and God's glory. And frequently, our human glory has nothing to do with God.

For example, many of our television programs and movies seem to glorify violence in order to sell toys to children. In the same vein, some who live overseas see Americans as arrogant, selfish, decadent, and uncaring. They judge American values by our rap music and television shows, most of which glorify sex, wealth, and violence.

C. S. Lewis, the twentieth century theologian, wrote in his essay *The Weight of Glory*, that “glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity.” He concludes that glory should be understood in the former sense, but states that one should not desire fame before men (human glory), but fame before God (divine glory).

Here is a further illustration of the difference between the two types of glory. The human ego seems to prefer a system of merit, where we can divide the world into winners and losers, rather than a system of grace, where merit or worthiness loses

all meaning. In the first case, at least a few of us good guys attain glory and are elevated above others. In the second case, all the glory is to God.

Human glory can often reflect the image of God that has been built into each and every one of us. But all too often human glory has nothing to do with God. It has to do with ego, power, and vanity. However, imagine what the world would be like if we focused on the all-important tasks of knowing God, loving God, and glorifying God.

Now, “we glorify God when our words and actions point to and reflect the reality of God. Glorifying God is honoring God with the truth about God, and celebrating God’s greatness. God is honored and glorified when Godly character is displayed.”

We glorify God when we lift God above ourselves.

We glorify God when we worship God.

We glorify God when we serve others.

We glorify God when we see the beauty in the great and wonderful diversity of creation including the diversity of human beings.

We glorify God when our lives reflect the beauty and glory of God.

We glorify God when we study the stories of God that are found in the Bible.

We glorify God when we bring peace instead of war.

We glorify God when we are the hands, and feet and voice of Christ.

We give glory to God when we pray or meditate.

We glorify God when we lean into the power of the Holy Spirit to connect us with all.

We give glory to God in the way that we live and move and have our being.

And, I am convinced that we give glory to God even after we die.

We were created to give glory to God.

Now, Julia Ward Howe wrote a final verse to her update of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. This is a verse that we did not sing.

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is Wisdom to the mighty, He is Succour to the brave,
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time His slave,
Our God is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah! Our God is marching on!