

***“Give God Glory”***

*“What do you get for the man who has everything?”* I thought that was an advertising slogan for some product back in the fifties or sixties . . . but I could not find anything online to suggest what product it advertised.

Not surprisingly, I found thousands of web sites that wanted an answer to that question. One man blogged this question because his family was getting on his case to provide them some ideas for his approaching birthday. I did indeed find a few answers to the question, *“What do you get for the man who has everything?”* . . . *“A box to put it all in.”* *“A woman to show him how to use it.”* *“Medication to cure it.”*

Some web sites offered different products, or generic answers to this question (here’s one site’s answers): *“Buy him the best-in-class example of whatever you're going to buy him within your budget.”* *“Buy him something he wouldn't buy himself.”* *A razor & brush set, cashmere socks, stationery, because it is personalized. Other great ideas include a leather wine bottle carrier, change base, flasks, a desktop lighter, or just about anything in alligator leather.”*

*“Buy him something he shouldn't buy for himself,”* suggests another — and zeroes in on cufflinks (I didn’t know that a man is not supposed to buy his own cufflinks . . . which may explain why cufflink sales have been down the past four decades). Yet another offers: *“Buy him something he already has”* — decanters, cigar humidors, corkscrew were suggested because we all have at least one of those somewhere. *“His favorite liquor is a safe bet.”*

There were more, but that’s the gist . . . in other words, if someone you know truly does have everything, ***“there is nothing new under the sun”*** (Ecclesiastes 1:9). There’s actually a better citation from that Book of the Bible that reminds us: ***“Vanity of vanities! . . . All is vanity.”*** (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

So let me ask a different question: *“I want to give you a gift. Will you*

*accept it?*” What is it? Is that what you ask of a gift-giver? Was that what your mother taught you? No! Okay, I’ll tell you: it’s a second right arm. Want it? Why not? *“Already got one . . . have no use for another one . . . wouldn’t know what to do with it.”*

Now, please look at the title for today’s sermon: *“Give God Glory.”* There is something wrong with that title; can you spot it?

How do you give something to God who already has all there is to have of what you are being told to give Him? I’m guessing that many saw that title and thought something like, *“Oh, we’re going to hear about what worship should entail.”* That is what we often consider to be the action covered by the phrase *“Give God Glory.”* But in today’s Gospel we get a much different picture to consider.

As He does so often (and almost *always* in the Gospel of John), Jesus makes a statement that seems to have nothing to do with the previous speaker’s request or question. Put yourself in Philip and Andrew’s place for a minute: You come to Jesus and say, *“There’s some folks who want to see you,”* and He responds, *“. . . unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* Except that is not the whole of His response; look at the text. He says, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

That’s even more confusing (or at least it’s as much of a *non sequitur*). Any way you cut up the quote, the reaction remains the same — huh??? Who was talking about “the hour” . . . or glorification . . . or wheat dying? Nobody has been talking about it, but evidently Jesus wants to.

The key to understanding this is to be found in the Greeks’ question: *“we wish to see Jesus.”* You want to see Jesus? There is only one place for you to see Him clearly, and know what He is about — and that is to see Him glorified.

But before you jump to the image of the returning Jesus — the image of

Jesus lots of people want you to have: the avenging King, the flame-breathing, nostril-snorting, “now-you’re-gonna-get-it” Jesus, coming with sword drawn and ledger book in hand to sort out this messy thing called humanity — before you picture that Jesus — recognize that in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ glorification is always His crucifixion: “. . . *when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*” Lest we missed what should be obvious, John adds the comment: “*He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*”

You want to see Jesus? Then look to the cross. You want to know what Jesus is all about? Then look to the cross. You want to know what it means to follow Him? To have life in Him? To be one of His children? His disciple? Then look to the cross.

In essence, Jesus tells Philip and Andrew that anyone who wants to see Him will soon be able to — He will be hung up on a cross for all the see. As He did three times quite formally in the Synoptic Gospels, so He does in John’s Gospel a bit more cryptically by accenting that “the hour” is near or “has come” And, as they do repeatedly in the Synoptic Gospels, the disciples either don’t “get it” or they don’t want to talk about it (understandable).

In part, because they intuit (it would a stretch to say they understand or comprehend) that when Jesus speaks of His own death, somehow their death gets rolled into the equation. And there is no question but that, when Jesus says “. . . *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit,*” He is talking not only of the manner of His own death, but the stark reality of the full cost of discipleship.

But what does that have to do with giving God glory? Listen to how Jesus goes on: “*Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I*

***have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’”***

Three quick points. First, note that Jesus does not seek to glorify the Father’s name; He asks the Father to do it. Second, what will glorify God name is Jesus’ commitment to doing what the Father has sent Him to do. Third, when we follow Jesus in that endeavor, God glorifies His name in us.

Do you see where the focus must be? Not on us, but on God. Not on what we want, but what God summons us to do. Not on keeping our noses clean, but on ***“bearing much fruit”*** as did Jesus.

In the coming weeks we will see where Jesus is going, and where we will need to be to be with Him and when we hear His summons to follow we may well know what it means to say, ***“Now my soul is troubled.”*** So are we to say when that happens, ***‘Father, save me from this hour’?*** No, we are to die to self so that we can die with Christ. What does mean?

It means, first of all, surrender or submission to God. This is hard for us; we like control. Some of us are more “control freaks” than others; but we all want autonomy. It’s why so many people resist surrendering their driver’s license long past the time when they should have — loss of license means loss of control. The same resistance comes when nursing home or assisted living is suggested; moving out of one’s home means surrendering autonomy . . . control.

In part, we resist surrendering to God, because we think such surrender means a net loss. But Jesus wants us to know that not surrendering is what results in loss: ***“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*** That’s the paradox; try to hold on to your autonomy, you lose everything; give that away to God, you gain everything. So why don’t we? Because we don’t quite yet believe that it could be true and God’s glory is denied!

The second way in which we die to self it to devote that self to others. In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen writes: ***“Who can save a child from a burning building without taking the risk of being hurt by***

*the flames? Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without the risk of experiencing similar pains of the heart or even losing his precious peace of mind. In short, who can take away suffering without entering it.*” Giving your life away, investing it in others, becoming what Nouwen calls a “wounded healer” (and the beauty of becoming a “wounded healer” is that you already know all about the “wounded” side of it), we lose our lives, our selves for the sake of others.

As Nouwen points out, there is risk in this; it is risky (or at least it *feels* risky) to let go in this way. Our self is highly self-protective; we like the counsel attributed to the poet Dylan Thomas: *“Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rage at close of day; Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.”* But Jesus counsels otherwise. He offers us something beyond the close of day — eternal life.

But lest we settled back into to our self-governed routines because “eternal life” is always at least a week from next Tuesday, recognize that Jesus offers eternal life now! It is found in the way we give our lives away to others.

Poet B.D. Prewter writes:

*Let this be admitted plainly:  
I shrink from being buried  
alive in Christ’s mission.*

*Where is hope to be found  
in grain shoved  
underground?*

*Why was this Jesus  
so uncompromising, blunt  
leaving no other choice  
when the world seems full  
of options not so dull?*

*I want to seize life  
and enjoy it’s favors*

*savoring its pleasures  
without worrying much  
about the results of such.*

*Why couldn't he  
have made the whole thing  
a bit easier for once.  
"Please yourself," why not say,  
"and now have a good day?"*

*Where is the glory  
in the precious grain buried  
in the dark, chill soil?  
Why is our way a loss  
compared to his bleak cross?*

*Let this be said plainly:  
it defies common sense  
this way that Jesus takes.  
Yet when go I just one mile  
with him, I start to smile.*

This is the paradox . . . this is our calling . . . to die that we may live . . .  
to live by giving life away. But after that loss . . . a smile . . . God's glory.

Wow and Amen.