

Jon Hauerwas – “Glory That Fills the Earth” – December 4, 2016
Romans 15:4-13 and Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

You may have heard it said that if your goal is to communicate a message so that it will be received and incorporated by others, then you need to present that message a number of times and in a variety of different ways. Simply put, repetition is important. Now I cannot say how well our ancestors could have articulated this hypothesis, but they certainly seemed to understand the premise. Just take our scriptures, for instance. Certain concepts, words, and phrases appear over and over again, signaling to us their significance in our lives of faith.

One of our texts comes from the Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew. And the other comes from the New Testament, which was penned in Greek. So, clearly, the original words were not the same in each of these passages. But, if you look closely at our English translations, you will find that the root word in both cases is most commonly translated as glory.

Glory is one of the great positive images in the Bible. The psalms contain more 50 references to the glory of God.¹ And our second lesson today from Psalm 72 concludes in this way: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does

¹ Editors Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible*. “Glory.” (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 330.

wondrous things. Blessed be God's glorious name forever; may God's glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen." It is this last phrase which inspired our sermon title this morning, "Glory That Fills the Earth."

Throughout scripture, glory is typically associated with God and with places of God's presence, including places of worship and heaven. Glory is akin to splendor, beauty, magnificence, and radiance. It is an ascription of praise and is a descriptor of God's greatness and transcendence. ²

More than this, God's glory is always experienced as awe inspiring and numinous. Glory, it seems, makes known or reveals that which is holy. Thus, when Moses encountered the glory of God on Mount Sinai, the visible manifestation was a cloud that covered the mountain with radiance. And when Moses asked to see God's glory, the intensity was so great that God intervened to shield Moses from the full effect. ³

Moses is said to have met with God on several occasions. And, following each meeting, Moses' face appeared to visibly glow. ⁴ We are reminded here of the

² *Ibid.*, 330.

³ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

Transfiguration, where Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. In the presence of that which is holy, something happens. We are physically and spiritually illumined.

In our first lesson this morning, the word glory or glorify appears three more times. Here Paul is instructing his listeners not to bring honor or attention to themselves, but to follow the example of Jesus by directing their efforts outward. In doing so, he claims, we bring glory to God.

Paul offers a similar argument in Philippians where he writes that Jesus “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the *glory* of God the Father.”

One might even argue that the purpose of the New Testament is to affirm that the glory of God's Word was uniquely manifested in Jesus. Jesus, we claim, did not

seek this glory for himself. And yet, he became the very embodiment of God's glory through his miracles and his complete obedience to God. In describing the birth of Jesus, Luke writes, "the glory of God shone around (the shepherds)" and the angelic host proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest." And in his Gospel, John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

To be in the midst of the divine presence is to be changed. And God's glory provides for catalyst for this change, which is the transformation of human relationships, of society at large, of the human heart, and even, the whole world.

So where do we find this presence – this glory? Quite simply, every time that we worship together. This is a theme that I heard over and over again from those who are joining our congregation today. God's glory and God's presence are here among us because we have extended the invitation and we have set the table of forgiveness.

As a pastor, I often have conversations with people who are experiencing end of life issues. At times, I will ask them if they are afraid. And I am always astounded

when I hear, “No. I’m not. Because I know who my God is and where I am going. There is nothing at all to be afraid of.”

And so, friends, as we approach this table of God’s mercy, we remember Christ’s death – yes. But, the story does not end there. For the presence of God’s glory in the form of Jesus from the beginning of time is also present in the resurrection, in order that God’s glory might fill all of the earth. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.