

John 13:31-35

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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The glory of God... How do you picture the glory of God? Dazzling light with golden hues? Majestic heights with a sweeping panorama of the universe stretching below and at your feet?

A shining and shimmering presence surrounded by an innumerable host of angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, and saints with golden halos - all praising the awesome Wonder of wonders? The glory of God...

What do you think it would mean for you to enter and share the glory of God? Talk about a mountaintop experience! It would be exhilarating - moving and grand, stupendous and mighty! You'd feel invincible and awesome, able to accomplish anything and afraid of nothing! It would be rapture. The glory of God...

Well, those were some of my ideas and imaginings...until I finally heard John's gospel. “When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.’” That's a lot of Glory-of-God talk, isn't it? “When he had gone out...” It wasn't Jesus who had gone out and then spoke. Jesus is still in the room with the disciples as his Last Supper continues. No, it was Judas who had gone out to finalize his dreadful betrayal of Jesus, the betrayal that will send Jesus to his death on a cross. And Jesus chooses that moment to talk about his being glorified by God “at once” and his sharing in God's glory right “now”?! “God will glorify him at once.” What's going to be happening “at once” is Jesus' arrest, manhandling by the guards, getting his face splattered by spit, his ripping flogging, his encounter with a cornered Pilate, his being stripped naked for all to see, his agony at being nailed to a cross, and his forsaken death. Where is there any glory in that?

So some folks have argued that Jesus is already looking beyond his awful suffering and terrible death to his awesome resurrection and his terrific ascension to God's right hand. But that just doesn't hold up in John's gospel. In John's gospel, the appearances of the risen Jesus are not really so awesome as they are personal, moving, and almost intimate. And John offers us no account of a terrific rocketing of Jesus into heaven. Several times the gospel of John does mention Jesus being lifted up; but the lifting up is never into heaven. Each and every time it's about Jesus being lifted up...on the Cross. The most inglorious thing the world has ever imagined - a cross of shame, suffering, and cruel death - that is the

glory of God! And it is so different from what we would imagine or expect! But just this is the profound message of John's gospel. When Jesus is lifted up on a cross, God is glorified and Jesus is sharing the full glory of God! The Cross is the Glory of God!

Whoa! All of us have trouble wrapping our minds around this. I don't know if I'll ever be able to fully understand or embrace this gospel truth: the Cross is the Glory of God. Jesus' Cross is not what had to be endured in order to gain the glory; Jesus' Cross is the Glory of God! The resurrection does not supersede the Cross; it validates the Cross of Jesus as the Glory of God. The risen Christ has scars that forever glorify the Crucified Christ. And nobody understood this more than did Martin Luther.

For Luther, God is above all else a God of grace, a God of unbelievable love. And God is such a God of grace and love only through what happened on the Cross of Jesus. The Son of God literally gave his all, even his last dying breath, to be and fulfill God's terrible love for the world.

In John's gospel, Jesus' last words are, "It is finished!" - but not in the sense of his being done for, but in the sense of "It is accomplished; it is completed," this utter love of God for the world, you, and me. The Cross is the eternal Glory of the God of Love. Love - utter, exhausting, pained, self-sacrificing, and final - Love is the Glory of God.

"Love." Well, I've used the word, which is something I find myself avoiding in many sermons, and not because I have anything against the love of God. But I have a lot of trouble with the world in which we now live...because it's a world that no longer knows what it means by "love." Ours is a world that readily confuses loving and liking. "I love chocolate. I love the beach. I love winning." So what is being communicated when we finally get around to saying, "I love you"? In too much of the latest tinkering with our liturgy, and in too much of the sermons proclaimed in our churches, I know pastors are trying to say that God loves us; but what they end up communicating is how God almost has to like us. At least that's how this world is hearing what they say. And it's a disaster for the proclamation of God's love. Do you think Jesus liked us and the world as we were taking his life away in such pain, shame, and unbelief? Folks, I'm not sure God *likes* us at all. But I am convinced God *loves* us all, and only because of that Cross...which is the Glory of God.

"Non-judgmental love..." That's quite a popular concept in our day, and a term that's used to tell us what true love should be like. But I just have real problems with that term "non-judgmental love." To be honest, my mother taught me that non-judgmental love is an oxymoron, a self-contradiction. I cannot think of a time when I did not know that my mother loved me. But I also can not think of a time when she did not feel compelled to share with me her judgments...about my behavior, about what might be good for me to change or to try, and about how I was coming across to others - and to her! Her judgments were not always painless to receive, let me tell you! But what was almost always clear to me was that she was making those judgments about my life because she loved me, because I mattered so much to her. Her judgments were not conditions for her to love me, or for me

to gain or keep her love. Her judgments were the results of her love for her child. I believe God's judgments are as well.

I know this may come as a surprise to you, but I was not always a very likable son, particularly a teenage son if you know what I mean. And I suspect my wife could tell you that I have not always been a completely likable spouse - and my daughter that I've not always been a completely likable father - and others that I've not always been a completely likable friend. And what may also come as a surprise to you is that you haven't been either! But right when we aren't and can't be liked, that's when we need to be loved most of all...and when we need to hear the judgment of the one who loves us nevertheless. The glory of God is not that God succeeds in liking us. The glory of God is that God succeeds in loving us and the world anyway and unconditionally. And because God loves us, because we somehow matter so much to God, Jesus goes to a cross to fulfill this awful love God has for us no matter what, and so that we can face the judgments of the One who doesn't ever have to like us...but always loves us anyway.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” In Jesus' world, love was not about how you felt about someone; love was about how you actually treated someone. Jesus is not commanding us to like one another. I know, what a relief, right? Jesus is commanding us to go out of our way to respect, care for, and accept one another, regardless of how we feel about them! I know, it's still quite a challenge! And a challenge we often dismiss, like to forget, and fail. But when you decide to try to love those whom you don't like, well, just then you are sharing the glory of God! And you are glorifying the Love of Jesus Christ!

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” I sometimes worry that our congregations offer so many happy opportunities for us to enjoy liking each other, while giving us precious little opportunity to learn how to love each other...especially during those moments when we don't necessarily like each other. If the truth be told, I like so many of you. But to share the glory of God, and to glorify my Lord Jesus, I need to grow in what it means to love you...regardless of whether I like you or not. How about you? Just imagine what our life in this body of Christ would be like when we would experience the glory of being so loved by Jesus...that we love one another.