
You Will See the Glory of God

A sermon by the Rev. Ashley Carr

The Homeless Requiem, remembering all those who died unhoused in Atlanta in the past year

I'll be honest with you, this text usually rubs me wrong when I hear it for the first time in a while. I can't help but run through the list of those I've loved and lost to the sting of death for whom Jesus did not show up and resurrect in bodily form. In a few minutes, we are going to read the names of God's children who took their final breath and didn't miraculously walk out of the cave with more life left to live. Jesus didn't resuscitate my daddy when he died. So, you know, yeah, it's hard for me to get peaceful knowing that Jesus has this trick up his sleeve and time and again he doesn't use it. It's hard not to feel a little betrayed, confused, maybe even angry.

Presumably, you're here tonight because one of your friends or your family members died in the last year, maybe out on the streets, maybe in a hospital room, maybe you were there with them, or maybe it was days before you found out that they were gone. Maybe you're surprised to see a name on the list that we'll read later on. Maybe you lost someone years ago, or maybe you just like good church with good people on a Friday night. I'm going to guess, though, that everyone in this room has had an experience with that thin thin space that we encounter only when death is in the room.

It really is the ultimate emotional melting pot, a loved one's death. We're sometimes shocked, sad, and angry, but perhaps there's also some relief in the end to suffering, or there's joy in telling the old stories and seeing faces we might not see so often. Perhaps there's pangs of regret, lost time, words that we cannot take back. For some of us, death is the inevitable consequence of practices that we have enabled, and there's a sense of responsibility woven through our dear one's demise. You see, there is so very much tangled up in the process of death.

And so, many of us who call ourselves believers, and others who don't, will look to scripture, to the stories of our Maker, for comfort, peace, understanding, anything to relieve the pain. Now, I'm not saying that's the whole point of scripture, but it's something we're looking for when we open our books. So, you came to church tonight with whatever relationship to death you carry, and you heard a story about Jesus resurrecting not your friend, but his friend. With all that complicated stuff in our hearts, this is what we hear.

If you'll trust a stranger, I'd love to promise you that there is good news in this text.

When we meet Mary in this bit of John's gospel, she's having that moment that we know all too well. The moment where you step out of the beeping sterile room to go get a breath of fresh air, the moment when you fall into the sofa after a day navigating crisis, the moment where we find ourselves looking for stillness and peace anywhere we can get it. Mary, stepping away from the diligent watch over her brother's body, she takes herself to the one she's come to trust and love who so often breathes peace into her heart. Can't you see them there, Mary staring into Jesus' loving eyes, sighing into her own hands, Jesus, you could have fixed this. You could have fixed this and you didn't. A raw and vulnerable moment between two souls deeply intertwined. A plea from Mary to Jesus.

For Jesus, that's turning point.

Prior to this moment, Jesus has been telling everybody, "God's glory will be revealed. Wait for it wait for it, God's glory is coming." And it's in that moment seeing his dear friend with a shattered heart, broken with grief, it's in that moment that Jesus realizes now is the time for God's glory to make itself known. Now's the time for God's glory. It was Jesus seeing his friend weeping, standing in the face of her real human grief, that showed

him that his friends needed the assurance of God's glory.

He could have said suck it up, death is part of life. He could have skipped to rainbows and smiley faces, you'll be okay. But no. Instead, he walks with his friend right into the center of her grief. Unafraid to look at it head on. Willing to open the door to suffering. Able to stand inside the circle of grief with the ones he loves. Filled with compassion, moved by the pain and sorrow before him, Jesus brings the unrivaled love and glory of God into that room.

Masterfully, he begins to pull away the layers of death. Strip by strip he undoes that which cannot be undone by any other. As those who love Lazarus watch on, they bear witness to the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Look at what he can do. No stone, no stench, no strips of cloth would be a match for the Son of Man, the one who brings God's glory inches from our eyes. Because Jesus was willing to engage the suffering and stand in the pain of death, he was able to see the need and to meet it in such a way that it could only be God and God's glory at work before them. Miraculous, powerful, awesome glory.

That is the God we believe in.

One who will walk into anything with us. One who will take on our burdens. One who will welcome our grief. One whose glory can and has raised children of God from the dead.

That is the God we believe in.

And yet.

Many are still gone. Many have not been reversed out of decay to stand before us examples of God's glory. Fair point. But how many other incredible examples of God's glory can you see? In the faces sitting all around this room, I see God's glory. In the one sitting on the sidewalk, and in the one who passes by, I see God's glory. In the hand that feeds and the hand that receives, I see God's glory. In the elements that some days bring us danger and other days bring us beauty, I see God's glory. In the hospital room, under the bridge, in the big fancy church, in dirty clothes, or whatever this is, I see God's glory.

This story is not designed to make us feel left out, although it is unafraid of our feeling such a way. This story of Jesus resurrecting his friend is about God's glory showing up in our times of need, in our sorrow, and in those thin thin spaces made only when death is in the room.

Those of us here tonight have not yet gone on to the blessed resurrection of eternal life in heaven. Instead, we remain here, mortal, magnets for the realities and complexities of life, but as we sit here, we sit underneath a great cloud of witnesses who have seen firsthand the glory of God. Up there are folks who cannot tell the story of their witness, but down here, we still can.

In our grief, in our sorrow, in our joy, in our relief, in our anger, we still must bear witness to the glory of God all around us. The best thing to do is open our tear-filled eyes to see what God is doing. Because God's glory doesn't stop, it doesn't have limits, and it doesn't shy away from even the biggest and scariest parts of our lives.

No, our friends and loved ones have not come back to life. But we can rest assured that they are sitting pretty at the right hand of God watching to see whether or not we bear witness to God's glory working in and among us all of the time.

We got a job to do.

It's time we see God's glory shining among us, and it's time we tell that story.

If you believe, you will see the glory of God.