

“Living in Glory”

John 17:1-11

June 1, 2014

7th Sunday of Easter

Most of us, at one time or another in our lives, have participated in organized sports of one kind or another in our neighborhoods, our schools, our communities, or, perhaps, even in college. While we might claim that we are doing it only for the exercise or fun of it, let's not kid ourselves. We do it for the glory which sports bring. Whether it be a pick up game or a professional game, we want to win and get the glory that comes through victory.

The only trouble is that most of us aren't very good or don't remain very good for very long. The glory fades. Yet we still desire that glory. So, what do we do? We live vicariously through other athletes and teams. Then a strange thing happens. When those teams are successful -- whether it be the Griz or Cats, CMR or Great Falls High, or even our son or daughter's little league team - we share in their glory. It shows in how we talk. Back in the day when we lived in Nebraska and the Nebraska football team was a national powerhouse, I'd have family and friends from out of state say, "Your team did pretty well." Now, I didn't play a down, complete a pass, or score a touchdown but, because of my connection to the team as a fan, it was somehow "my" team and I was sharing in the glory. I'm sure you've had similar experiences. You've perhaps even got caught up in the whole glory thing when you started using the word, "we", with regard to successful teams. "We should make the playoffs next year!" "W could win the World Series this year."

We receive glory for the success of the team as though we were out on the field or court playing the game ourselves. We have done nothing, yet we still share in that glory. We are receiving glory for something we have nothing to do with, glory we certainly do not deserve.

And what do we do with this glory? This undeserved glory is returned to the team and shared with those around us. We cheer for them. We pay money to go to their games. We buy

merchandise -- caps, t-shirts, sweatshirts, foam #1 fingers - anything with the team's name, colors, and logo on to spread their glory. We talk about their glory to anyone around us who will listen.

Our God has been very successful. He has created a beautiful world in which we live. As the psalmist writes, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Ps. 19:1) Although this world and everything and everyone in it have been tainted by sin, God would not allow His glory to remain tarnished. He sent Jesus to restore the glory of creation and the glory of the crown jewel of His creation -- humanity.

Now, you might think that glorification occurs through strength, power, and might. That is the kind of Messiah the Jews were looking for. Maybe that’s the kind of Messiah we would like, as well. If you listen to a lot of contemporary Christian music, you hear a lot about the power, the might, and the strength of the Lord as if that is where His glory supposedly lies.

But it doesn’t. It’s like sports. The glory of the championship is not born on the day on which that championship is won, but in the sweating, training, and pain of practice, work outs, and training sessions. In the same way, the glory of the Lord is not found in displays of power, might, and strength, but in the suffering, bleeding, and dying of the cross. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus, on the night before He died realized this. He prayed, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.” Jesus was glorified by dying on the cross to earn forgiveness and life for sinners. God the Father was glorified through Jesus’ obedience to that plan.

Through the blessings of our gracious God, we are winners, too. We are allowed to share in His glory. In Baptism, God glorified us by putting His own name on us and making us his very own children through the water and the Word. We share in the glory of God when we confess our sins before the altar of God and find forgiveness there as well. We share in the glory of God when we read His Word and trust His promises of love and deliverance. We share in the glory of God when we share in the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper - given and shed for us for the forgiveness of all our sins.

We have in no way earned that glory or deserve it. Like sports fans who weren’t around when their team achieved glory in the toil and sweat of practice and training, we weren’t even there when

Jesus achieved glory by His suffering and death on the cross. Nevertheless, God loves us so much that He gives it to us anyway. As Peter says in his first letter, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Since God has allowed us to share in His glory, we, like excited sports fans who want to return that glory to their team and share the glory of their team with anyone who will listen, want to return that glory to God and tell of His glory to anyone who will listen. Jesus says in our Gospel lesson, “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.” Jesus is no longer visibly here. He has ascended back into heaven. We are left here to be purveyors of that glory to the world. But how do we do that?

Jesus’ disciples gave glory to God when they obeyed that Word. Jesus prayed, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” We give glory to God when we act upon the Word of God and not simply hear it. Jesus’ last words before ascending into heaven were, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Making disciples, baptizing, and teaching all give God glory.

Speaking the Gospel gives God glory. No one around here who loves sports has to be told to talk about it. You just do it. No one who has truly experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ has to be told to talk about it. You just do it. You have the prayers of Jesus Himself to protect you as you do it. As He prayed for His disciples, He prays for us, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name --the name you gave me --so that they may be one as we are one.” And you have the special Counselor - the Holy Spirit - whose sending we celebrate next week - to inspire and guide you.

Jesus gave glory to God by the work He did. In His prayer, He said, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” Jesus lived His life by serving, rather than

being served. He not only spoke of the love of God, but He showed the love of God in all that he did. The early Christians gave glory to God by how they treated each other and how they treated those outside the church. Tertullian, a 2nd century church father, quoted pagans as saying, "See how those Christians love one another."

We, too, give glory to God by how we act and how we treat one another. People notice our behavior; how we treat each other within the church; how we act toward people outside the church; how we react when someone offends us; how we deal with crises in our lives. In all that we say and do, we want to reflect the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. However, we reflect the glory of our Lord best when we don't try to display His holiness and perfection, which is impossible, but when we reflect His love and forgiveness. We joyfully receive God's love and automatically share that love with our fellow Christians and, especially, with those who do not yet know Christ. We thankfully receive the forgiveness of God for our sins and then without hesitation pass that forgiveness on to others no matter what they have done to us..

Don't you just love it when, after something good has happened, someone says, "Just think -- the best is yet to come." This happens in sports when a team wins a championship. "The best" is returning home to celebrate the glory of that championship in a big parade. My family and I got to experience that when our son, Andy, and his high school basketball team won the state championship. They returned home to a parade and big pep rally.

As Jesus prepared for the glory of the cross, He also knew the best was yet to come. So, He prayed, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Jesus would receive that glory when He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and assumed His power at the right hand of God.

That same glory is awaiting you and me. As we, by faith, see the glory of Christ in the cross and reflect that glory in what we say and do, I can say with great confidence, "Just think -- the best is yet to come." What we see and experience now in God's love for us and our reflection of that love to

others is only a preview of the glory that is to come -- not glory that was ours when the world began, but glory that has been given to us in our baptisms, strengthened by His Word, and renewed by Holy Communion. The best *is* yet to come. St. Paul put it this way to the church in Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!" (Phil. 3:20 - 4:1)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm in the glory which has been revealed to you and in you.

Stand firm in the glory which you give to God and reflect to others. Stand firm in the glory that is yet to come. Amen.