

The other day, driving not far away from here, I found myself looking at a lavender sunset. How many sunsets do we witness? How many sunsets do we look at and say *oh, that's nice?* But how many sunsets do we truly encounter, allowing the beauty of the setting sun, the sky and perhaps the clouds to speak to us...?

I do not remember stopping very often to truly allow such things into my life. I remember sidelong glances at 60 miles per hour. I remember pushing away beauty and the natural world, but this time--just the other day-- I stopped. I pulled over and sat there with the window down looking at the shifting patterns of wispy cirrus clouds. They seemed like cotton. Not cotton balls mind you but strands, as if the cotton had been pulled apart. But the big story was lavender. Everything was tinged by lavender.

When I think of glory, I think of things like this. Lavender sunsets. We use the word 'glory,' a lot. Sometimes, it seems to me that we overuse it, wear it out a bit. Glory or glorify is a central, featured term in our prayer life from The Book of Common Prayer. For example, Cantic 13, A Song of Praise, *Benedictus es Domine*, begins *Glory to you, Lord God of our Fathers, you are worthy of praise; glory to you.* Then it repeats the phrase *Glory to You* five more times until near the end it says, *Glory to you, beholding the depths; in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.* Now --because I stopped and dared to be quiet and to look-- when I think of these phrases, *beholding the depths, in the high vault of heaven* I am also reminded of lavender sunsets.

And then there is Cantic 12 -- Cantic 12 A Song of Creation is more extensive. It moves from the Cosmic Order to the Earth and Its Creatures to The People of God themselves and in each section issues the imperative *Glorify the Lord. Glorify the Lord, all you works of the Lord.*

In these canticles, 'glory' is linked to praise and to exultation. To say, 'glory to you, Lord God' we begin to engage our hearts, minds and spirits in an action which moves us

away from ourselves and into a place where proper deference and weight is given to that great mystery which said *Let there be...* and by that action expressed us all into the reality and into the conscious awareness in which we now find ourselves. And so we open the portal to the spiritual realm when we pause and say: Glory to you.

In the scriptures "glory" means 'weight' or 'importance.' To have glory is to have a certain substantive weight. Glory is used to show or reveal the significance of something to the world. And so we can speak of glorious sunsets to underscore their reality and substance and beauty. And also, in praising God, we can point out the importance, the reality, the substance of that presence which we can only but dimly see. Glory says in essence, pay attention, stop and look around. Stop and look around and pay attention to the beauty of the Lord.

In our reading from Hebrew Scripture this morning, the book of the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet speaks of a profound understanding that has come to him. In and of itself, this is a glorious moment for the prophet suddenly understands that the old Covenant between YHWH and the people of Israel is going to be renewed in a startling and dramatic manner:

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

God wrote an initial covenant on tablets of stone in an action that itself was glorious. The glory of the Lord came in the form of a cloud upon a mountaintop and the laws describing and dictating a new relationship with this God came in the form of tablets of stone. But now... the finger of God is not writing laws on tablets of stone. The beauty of it, the glory of it is, that the YHWH will come again to this people and write the dictates of this covenant relationship directly on their hearts: ... *this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* A new connection is being intimately forged deeply within the people. We can imagine that this new connection will make it possible for people to

suddenly come alive and to praise and to glorify and to exalt the presence of YHWH their Lord from the depths of their being, from their very hearts.

But when we come to our Gospel lesson this morning, we come to something quite startlingly different.

23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 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. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life... "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. 28 Father, glorify your name."

Here is a place where weight and attention is not drawn to things like sunsets. Rather the focus, the weight, the attention, the glory is drawn to a place of suffering. Here glory asks us to look at the significance of Jesus himself, a lonely figure as he approaches suffering and death on a cross. Here is a proclamation that human actions can also be glorious. That glory need not be confined to traditional understandings like sunsets. Other things are glorious, even when they are initially stark and haunting and disturbing things like the cross itself.

As we approach Holy Week, in our Gospel today, Jesus asks us to reconsider where beauty and glory and exaltation may be found. He speaks of losing life, of grain falling into the earth and dying. In somewhat veiled terminology, he speaks of his own mission and purpose. And I believe he is asking us to reconsider the ways in which we worship him, asking us to come alive, to have his purposes and intentions ---his law of love-- written upon our hearts; asking us to wake up to beauty that comes when we too, as his disciples, hear his call to service and walk into the world.

Yesterday was St. Patrick's day. Our society and culture has glommed on to St. Patrick so much so that perhaps we forget some things about this patron saint of Ireland. Patrick, Bishop and Missionary of Ireland was born in Britain around 390 and died in 461. At sixteen he was captured by Irish slavers, carried off to Ireland and became a slave tending sheep. Until this time, by his own writings, he had cared nothing for God,

but now he turned to God for help. After six years, he either escaped or was freed and made his way back 200 miles to his home, much changed. He studied for the priesthood and in 435 was commissioned to return to this his place of loneliness and suffering. His witness was powerful and dramatic. All of Ireland was changed. But one thing we may forget was Patrick's witness against slavery and the slave trade in which the saint boldly denounced slavery and those powerful persons who were practicing it. He spoke truth to power.

Now we are in a time in which we too are being asked to consider our own views about social issues. This past week, our own Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Steven Miller of The Diocese of Milwaukee, forwarded to all priests in the Diocese, a Statement from The House of Bishops at their annual retreat in Texas issued on the 7th of March. A copy of that statement has been placed on the bulletin board. It is a statement on gun violence that has been unanimously accepted by the House of Bishops.

Bishop Miller encourages us to read and reflect on this statement. In his email message he also wrote:

I encourage you to join me in taking part in the March for Our Lives on Saturday, March 24. The principal march will be in Washington, DC. I am still discerning whether or not I will attend that march or one of those scheduled here in Wisconsin. ... Please continue to join me as we work to make our world a safer place.

As your priest, I ask all of us to be prayerful and not merely reactive when presented with calls to action. The Bishops were moved to make this statement because, in their words, "Young people of the United States are inviting us to turn away from the nightmare of gun violence to the dream of choosing life."

They came to Philipp and said to him, *we would see Jesus*. We are outsiders like they were and we, too, would see Jesus. *Be thou my vision O Lord of my life. Be Thou my wisdom and Thou my true Word*. How do we give glory to God? How is the law of God's love being written upon our hearts? I invite all of us to pray for discernment as we, God's people, journey towards Holy Week and the great example of God's love that we call *the cross*. In the name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen