

Trinity Sunday, 26 May 24
Church of the Resurrection

Isaiah 6.1-8

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

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Do you have a drawer or cupboard where you put things you don't know what to do with? And it all just accumulates in there? I have heard it called a glory hole. The glory must be the expression on your face when you go looking for something in that drawer or cupboard.

Glory of a different sort is expressed in the British National Anthem. In it there is a prayer for the King, that his reign over his subjects might be happy and glorious. In that context 'glorious' means illustrious, honourable, splendid, magnificent. It's a prayer that great things would proceed from the King and be accomplished by him. He embodies the nation in his person; so when he is glorious, the lives of the British people will also be filled with glory. Kind of quaint to our ears, but there it is.

Glory is an important Christian word. It describes the holy Trinity in one word. It appears no less than 468 times in one English version of the bible. Glory in the biblical sense is the greatness that proceeds from God and shines on God's people.

The writer to the Hebrews says in his opening verses that the Son of God is the brightness, the light shining from its source, 'the reflection of God's glory.' And he is the brightness of God because, as the writer says, 'he has purged sins away, [and now] has taken his seat at the right hand of the divine majesty on high.' That is a reference to the ascension, the feast day that was celebrated just before Pentecost, which was just before today, the feast of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus did not die a second time - he returned fully alive in his body to heaven. His sitting at God's right hand refers to the place of honour he took next to the king. This descriptive language no doubt relies on images of human rulers and empires, because when it comes to God, we are at a loss trying to describe what is really ineffable, extraordinary and sublime.

In John's gospel, the word 'glory' appears 19 times. It was this John who was perhaps closest to Jesus, together with James and Peter. John is the one who was reclining against Jesus at the last supper. John felt compelled to write of Jesus: 'we saw his glory.'

Here is the way one translation puts it:

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighbourhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
generous inside and out,
true from start to finish. [The Message]

This present generation looks for that kind of authenticity. The Word is the Trinity's display of truthfulness. Sadly the world looks to the church and doesn't see it. Simon Tugwell of the Order of Preachers says the church has to be disappointing. As St Paul says, we carry this treasure in earthen vessels.

People often have a sense of awe or wonder at some natural beauty spot. For many this happens at the Shrine of Remembrance at the dawn service on Anzac Day. For others it happens in Honour Avenue during the autumn festival. What they are seeing is the glory, the reflected light of the Creator – with the danger of falling in love with the reflection and not the Creator.

But the glory of God is also different: the people of Israel believed that they could not look on God's face and live. Nor could they even speak his name. He is the great 'I am.' From our Hebrew ancestors in faith these are appropriate cautions for those who think they know all the answers. Israel had to settle for seeing God's glory, which is itself overwhelming.

When they were wandering in the desert, the people of Israel could only see a bright cloud as evidence of the divine presence. When the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of what appeared to be a human form on a throne, what he saw was like fire, a brilliant luminescence in human shape. But he could not see the face of the person who was on the throne. It was obscured by the glory.

At the birth of Jesus, the shepherds in the fields saw an angel and found themselves surrounded by the glory of God, and they were terrified. We don't often think of God being terrifying. We can swear by him regularly and nothing happens. But perhaps we have become too complicated, and have removed him from our spiritual horizons. Maybe God in reality is terrifying, until we come to know him through his Son. And even then he is not ours to own but to worship in love.

As John writes in his gospel, the disciples were with Jesus for some 3 years, and they saw his glory. It was particularly visible in the miracles that Jesus did, which John calls signs, because they pointed to who Jesus is. They had that enormously special privilege, in that they saw the face of God. As Jesus said to Philip, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.' Should we be surprised that there are no extant pictures of what Jesus looked like? He is hidden from those who are not seeking him.

On one occasion three of them, Peter, James and John, went up a mountain with Jesus, where briefly he appeared in all his glory. The three disciples were terrified when God spoke. It was a similar experience for Moses when he went up the mountain to receive the commandments. The people of Israel were told not even to look towards the top of

the mountain, or they would perish. There is something about the glory of God that is as frightening as it is wonderful. We do well to avoid bringing God down to our level. It is God who must, and has, come down to ours.

The revealing of God to people in the bible is progressive. It began with little glimpses of God's awesomeness in Old Testament times and ended in Jesus. Along the way the people of Israel saw God's presence confined first of all in the covenant box, the ark of the covenant, in which they placed the two stone tablets of the commandments. When God was not confined to a box, he was localised in the Temple in Jerusalem, where his glory was seen in the ritual animal sacrifices and in the clouds of incense.

The final step in God's revealing of himself was the big one: he came in human form. He was identified by those who met and knew him by the way he lived and spoke. There had been others before him who claimed to be God's son. Augustus Caesar accepted as one of his titles that he was God's son. But his life could hardly be compared to Jesus. Neither could anyone else's.

The culmination in Jesus' life was his death, given up for his friends, and his coming alive again on the third day. It was a complete overthrow of the old ways of perceiving God and hoping to please him. It was the greatest statement about love ever made.

After Jesus was with his friends for some 40 days, he ascended to his Father in heaven. He had to leave, so that he could be with his friends anywhere and always, until his promised return one day. Access is gifted through the Holy Spirit.

God's greatness, his luminescence, his glory, is proceeding outwards towards all his creation. Do we live as if this is true? Actually 'greatness' is likely the wrong word to describe God. We attach so much of our own baggage to 'greatness,' which says that it is in money, sex, power, and celebrity status.

At the centre of biblical revelation is the amazing statement of John, that the pinnacle of glory was seen when Jesus was nailed to the cross.

Jesus shows us the glory of self-sacrifice, the glory of love gone as far as it can go, the glory of identification with all who suffer, of accepting the sin of the world on his shoulders, of the infinite worth of each of us. This is true glory, true greatness.

The last word on glory has to be where it is found today. St Paul says that glory is to be found in the church. By church he means the gathering of Christian people wherever we meet, in a humble village in Africa, in a deprived suburb, or in a well off town. Glory will be found right here, where people are open to the transforming power of God and doing God's works.

As we remember this week of national reconciliation, God's glory will also be seen as Australia's indigenous peoples are accepted and respected, when the dignity conferred in baptism is recognised in every person, irrespective of race, gender, sexuality, or wealth.

So we can pray with St Paul:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)

To return to my original question: do you have a drawer or cupboard where you put things you don't know what to do with? A glory hole? I would like to rephrase the question: do you have a glory-shaped space in your life, a space or place in which you have met or do meet with the living God?

Trinity Sunday says: let God be more than we think God is. May we be overwhelmed in our everyday by the glory. May all our thoughts actions and words give glory to God.