

Epiphany Glory: It's Good For You

Isaiah 60:1-6

January 6, 2019

It is called the Minnesota Miracle. If you are a football fan (and I am), we are in the midst of the playoffs to see who gets to play in the Super Bowl on Feb 3. The Minnesota Miracle happened in last year's playoffs. The Minnesota Vikings were losing, and down to their last play of the game. If they lost this game, their year was over.

If you are from Minnesota (and I am), you know that we are used to our teams losing. We expect them to lose. So when something goes right....

Well, our quarterback threw a long pass down the field. It was caught, and the receiver ran down the field for a game-ending touchdown. The people of Minnesota went absolutely bananas. Together, we experienced a moment of glory with our beloved team.

In our scripture passage today, the prophet Isaiah is writing to God's people in a time of deep darkness for them. They have been losing a lot. But God is promising that something good was going to happen. "The Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you," the prophet says.

Israel's situation was very much like the Minnesota Vikings being down 5 points and needing a touchdown with three seconds on the clock. But God tells Israel to look for a Hail Mary pass! Glory!

The passage talks about God's glory, but what is it? We sing about it in worship (the choir did today), but what is the glory of the Lord?

I like this explanation from another pastor (John Piper): Another verse in Isaiah says that the angels are crying, "Holy, holy holy is the Lord God almighty. The whole earth is full of God's...." You expect the verse to end with "holiness." If God is holy, then the earth should be full of God's holiness. But it doesn't say holiness. It says: the whole earth is full of God's glory.

Holy and glory. To be holy means to be set apart. To be set apart means nothing is like that thing that is set apart. God is holy, so God is set apart and nothing else is like God. God's perfection and greatness and worth are so distinct from us, God is put in a separate category. This is holiness.

The glory of God is God's holiness going public. It is the way God puts his holiness on display for people. It is the outward manifestation of God's holiness.

Another person (Frederick Buechner) says glory is God's style, sort of like when we say an artist has a certain style. So when scripture says "the heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1), it is saying that the heavens are revealing God's holiness and doing it in God's style with starry nights, and comets, and meteor showers, northern lights, a blood moon (coming soon, by the way). Glory is displaying God's holiness in God's style.

When we say the heavens are telling of God's glory, it means God is shouting at us. God shouts with clouds and blue sky, and with galaxies and stars. God is shouting, I am glorious. Open your eyes. I am holy; look at my style. Glory!

Today is Epiphany Sunday, where we remember the wise men finding the child Jesus by following a star, God's glory in the sky, a powerful light that shone around the shepherds when they heard the angels say, "Glory to God in the highest."

This child grew up to show God's style in everything he said and did. Glory appeared in the transfiguration of Jesus, and in the resurrection. Looking back, the apostle Paul rejoiced that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The glory of God (or God's style) was being revealed to the world in Jesus Christ.

And God shouted at us through his son. The gospel of John says that when the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, it was then that we saw "the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This means that God's glory is not just far off in the heavens. God's glory is in Jesus Christ, the One we follow.

When have you experienced God's glory not far off?

It was in my church in Minneapolis. A pastor at our church, my colleague and friend, at age 43 died suddenly. He died on Maundy Thursday, 3 days before Easter. A Maundy Thursday service was already scheduled, I had planned it, and so our people arrived and heard the news.

All our plans for the service that night went out the window. We just stood up, told our people that Craig was gone, and we wept together, sang together, read scripture together.

All that day, the sky was filled with dark heavy clouds that hung low and matched our sorrow.

The front of the sanctuary faced west and had large stained glass windows. We called them the Resurrection Windows. As the sun began to go down during our worship service, the clouds cleared in the western sky and the sun shone through.

One of the pastors who was leading the worship at that moment said, "Look, and pointed to the stained glass windows. Sunlight had hit the Resurrection windows, and rays of colorful stained glass spread out among the congregation, reflecting off of each of our faces. We stopped, and in silence watched the glory of the Lord reflecting on each one of us in our time of grief. Without a doubt, we knew God was there in that moment.

Back to verse 1: the first two words are a call to "Arise and Shine." The Message translation says "Put your face in the sunlight." On that Maundy Thursday, we put our face in the sunlight.

In our Isaiah passage, the Israelites were in darkness, but God said, "Lift up your eyes and look about you." Put your face in the sunlight; see what God will do. Glory.

If you are willing to search for the light of God in times of deep darkness, you will find it. Glory.

If you look for Jesus Christ in situations of chaos and confusion, you will discover him. Glory.

If you train your eyes on the glimmers of light that appear in our shadow times, you will emerge from the blackness that threatens to overwhelm you. Glory.

Although darkness shall cover the earth, promises Isaiah, “the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you” (v. 2).

When have you experienced God’s glory not far off?

When the Minnesota Miracle happened, what did people do? They put their face in the sunlight. They leapt to their feet in one collective breath and started screaming at the television. Jumping up and down, hugging one another. Popcorn going all over the place. People cheering and running throughout their homes. Basking in the glory! Together.

So arise and shine. The light and glory of God is upon you. Put your face in the sunlight because the glory of the Lord has risen on you. Bask in the glory. That’s what we do when we come here together and worship. We bask in the glory of God’s holiness and style....together.

Glory!

