

Sunday, May 28th 2017

Easter 7

Acts 1:6-14; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11;

John 17:1-11

The Rev Fanny Belanger

A few days ago, as I was walking in my neighborhood
I spotted this cat in a front yard.

Because I love cats, I called her and she came to say hello,
and I started petting her,

but it was only to realize how filthy she was:

long white hair turned gray and greasy with twigs stuck in it.

And as the cat kept purring and rubbing, I was starting to think that it was really nice but still a bit
disgusting.

That's when I heard this lady sitting on the porch,

calling out to me with the proudest look on her face:

"That's our cat, isn't she wonderful?"

We're so lucky to have her."

It was so sweet, it made me smile and reminded me of comic book I used to have:

A guy who wrote stories about cats.

And there is this strip where you see one of those furry funny looking cat figures
looking totally ordinary

and yet literally surrounded by a blaze of glory

and on the drawing, the owner is pictured with stars in the eyes gazing with wonder,

and it reads underneath: "Everybody think their cat is the best cat in the world".

Everybody think their cat is the best cat in the world.

Well, interestingly, a theologian wrote about that.

William Temple nonetheless, one of our greatest Anglican theologians.

Temple wrote that when we see how much animals

- not only men -

when we see how much even animals love to be praised, we cannot doubt for a minute that this world
was made for glory.

We cannot doubt that this world was made for glory.

Glory.

That's the program for all of us, you see.

And perhaps we won't understand much about what happens in this world, if we're unable to see this.

Today we hear Jesus's last words,

this portion of John's Gospel that is squeezed between the last supper and Jesus's arrest.

Yet we read it after Easter because it does not talk about suffering and death,

it talks about glory.

And so this is the program for Jesus,

the whole program is God's glory.

And I think really, it takes us to another level.

There are many ways to read the Gospel, many ways to understand Jesus's life and what he
came to do in the world.

Prophecy, piety, hospitality, social justice, teaching, healing,

Love, evidently.

But today we learn that all that, as good as it may sound, is not enough if we don't understand that
the aim of it all is glory.

Glory.

Now this is a dangerous word, isn't it?

Good Christians use to think glory is the reverse of humility, and if we long for glory, it will necessarily be *vain* glory.

A glory that will cast shadow on God's glory, *to God only be the glory*.

But the problem is

if we reject glory as such a bad thing for us, how do we get a chance to understand how good is God's glory?

And we have to acknowledge: we want glory. We wish to be known, to be seen.

We wish to be remembered.

At the face of the whole world or just with our own circle of friends,

we often long for our *fifteen minutes of fame*, don't we?

And yes it can be superficial, sometimes narcissist,

but if we hold back our judgment for a while, and look deeper than that – what does it say about us?

Well, I think Temple was very right, I think it says:

We don't only need to be appreciated,

It's even not enough to be loved.

We want to feel special.

And as I was reading this Gospel I thought well maybe, maybe there is nothing wrong about it,

because maybe, like cats already know,

we are truly meant for glory.

Let me tell you a story.

I was with a group of volunteers, and we were talking about a clothes donation we had.

We had been giving away stuff for the winter to the homeless, and we talked about this very annoying lady who absolutely wanted a coat when she already had one.

And most of the volunteers were indignant: Wasn't it good enough she had a warm coat?

But another volunteer in the group interrupted us and said:

I think she wanted this one just because it was pretty.

And she added: *Well, isn't it right for a woman to want to be pretty, even though she is homeless?*

Isn't it right to think that it's not enough to receive charity, but to want a treat?

It reminded me of a line in a movie I like.

This guy is buying a present for Christmas to his mistress and he asks her what she needs

to which she replies *I don't want something I need, I want something I want.*

Yes, we want special and unique,

and so often as Christians we won't go beyond

polite appreciation and welcome.

Well, it's great to be appreciated and welcomed

but how many people are dying deep inside, because nobody ever make them feel special?

Parents, spouses, children.

It's not enough that they love us, we want to have a unique place in their lives.

Is a lack of humility, or is what love is really about?

Well, when I hear the Gospel today, I can't help thinking: Love is to be known as unique.

Love is about glory.

So what is it that we don't get about glory?

We think about it in terms of competition, exclusion and domination.

We think that the glory of one casts shadow on others.

If we glorify somebody, then it has to mean we downplay or condemn someone else.

Actually, this is just what we do, including when we read John's Gospel.

John's Gospel describes very well the close relationships Jesus had with his disciples, and how Jesus did not only love them, but honored them, calling them by names, made them feel special

(As he did when he washed their feet on this last supper).

But each time Jesus says something special for his disciples, we conclude that it excludes those who aren't friends.

If Jesus promises eternal life to those who know him,

then we conclude it must mean that those who don't know Jesus will go to hell.

Well, when we wish well to our close ones, does it mean we wish ill to the other ones?

I think it's the other way around.

The more you love the ones you love, the more your heart should become open to other people as well.

Love does not cast shadows on love.

Glory should not cast shadows on glory.

Do you really think we can hinder God's glory?

So what's the problem when we think about glory?

The problem is that we think about glory in terms of fame.

Well to glorify is indeed to make known, but it's not about fame, it's about revelation.

It's about Revelation.

Jesus tells us that he came into the world to reveal God's glory, to make God's name known, and that God's glory is his glory, and that we are all one in this glory.

His glory is God's glory is our glory.

We are all made for glory, and each one of our blaze of glory instead of casting shadow on others should illuminate and reveal them.

In the Apostles' Creed, we mention the *Communion of Saints*, well, that's what it's all about.

Through God, revealing each others' uniqueness, beauty and goodness.

A few centuries ago, we used to think that the earth was the center of the universe.

Then we thought it was the sun.

Modern physics revealed to us that there is no center to the universe or better, that actually everywhere is the center of the universe.

Well, I think this is the eye of God.

God has no peripheral vision.

God only sees centers, best, special and unique.

Each one of us is at the center, for real.

When you come close to Christ, you discover you belong

You are one, only, one with him and also one for him

not only pardoned and accepted as we so often preach, but irreplaceable, longed for, desired, exalted.

“Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?”

Jesus at the end of his life, tells us why he came for.

He came to reveal God.

As the disciples will learn, it has nothing to do with *making Israel great again*.

God’s glory is God revealed, made known to us.

God’s purpose is God, right, there is no other purpose.

But God is made known because the Son’s mission is to take us with him.

We are made for this glory.

And maybe like the cat, we know that deep down.

Often people who succeed in life say *they knew from the beginning that they were special*.

So should we all seek fame? I don’t think so.

Indeed, this glory has little to do with fame.

And this is what Jesus teaches us when he shows that *his glory is to give his life for God’s glory*.

You know we use to think about life in terms of

good and bad

right and wrong

happy and sad

And so did people at Jesus’s time.

But Jesus’s only purpose what to seek what gave glory to God,

and so he was not prisoner of any category.

He thought he could heal on a sabbath because healing gave more glory to God than religious observance.

And on that day, dying for our sins, or if you prefer, dying because of our sins,

dying because of our rejection,

gave more glory to God than fleeing away

and rejecting us.

God’s love is manifested in Jesus who never rejects us, even when we reject him in the worst way.

Maybe today we can ask ourselves: What is it in our lives that gives glory to God,

reveals God’s beauty and God’s goodness?

What does not?

How do we encourage others to reveal themselves?

When asked about what it was to be a saint, and why some saints were so obviously radiant and other ones barely noticeable,

Ste Therese pointed to the garden of her convent and said:

We nuns are like those flowers.

Some are roses, some are lilies, some are violets, some are the grass of the field.

Each one of us is unique, made to fulfill perfectly her role,

each one is made to be the best flower she can be,

reflecting the beauty of all the other flowers in God’s garden.

You don’t have to be a rose, don’t even strive to be an imperfect rose when you can be a perfect violet.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God

Become who God is calling you to be.

Being to the full our most beautiful self,

as Jesus, that’s how we will reveal to the world God’s glory. Amen.