

Date: February 28, 2021 (Lent 2)

1. Texts: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Ps. 22:22-30; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38.
2. Subject: faith.
3. Topic: faith as interpretive framework.
4. Aim: challenge, educate.
5. Proposition: "With faith we can not only recognize God at work, we can cooperate with him."

FAITH AS OUR LENS

Once, a cousin of my wife had an appointment in Edmonton for a scan, just ahead of my own. We knew each other. We saw each other. But we didn't immediately recognize each other. We were out of context. We would never expect to meet one other in that hospital. One way of looking at it: we weren't wearing the right lenses, so we didn't immediately see one another.

It works in a similar way with God and his works. Without the correct lens in place, we often don't recognize him at work. The Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent illustrates this. It assumes that we need to put on the right lens to recognize God:

Almighty God, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross, *give us faith to perceive his glory...*¹

The lens that empowers us to recognize God at work is faith.

Now, we know that faith is not the same as what we believe. We believe the foundational truths. We believe that God is love and Jesus is our Saviour. We believe that we are saved by grace. We might even believe *in* God, which is to say that we believe that God exists. But these foundational truths are not the same as faith.

Faith is a relationship. It is a relationship marked by love and trust. It is a relationship that guides our actions. It is a relationship that empowers us to make sacrifices on behalf of the one in whom we place our faith.

¹ "The Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent", *The Book of Alternative Services*, The Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, 1985, p. 288.

In Christian terms faith is a relationship with God as he revealed himself through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. We love God as he showed himself to be in Jesus. We trust God to be God for us. We allow that love and trust to shape what we do. This is the relationship we call “faith”.

This relationship enables us to recognize God at work.

Think of it this way: back in the days of Jesus everyone could witness what he did. Lots of people talked about what he did. 5000 people crowded around to hear him and to eventually be fed by him. But only twelve became apostles. Only 72 became evangelists. Only a couple of hundred followed him. The difference is that these people had the faith to perceive God at work.

The work that the collect wants to focus on is God’s glory. This is a mystical kind of thing, but it’s very popular in Christian spirituality, poetry and hymnody. There are about 20 hymns in our latest hymn book that focus on glory. “Song Select”, an online music source, has 3,893 songs with the theme of glory. We recite the Gloria most Sundays in most of our churches. But even with this preponderance of proclamation, we need faith to perceive God’s glory. Without faith, we can only believe that God must be glorious. With the lens of faith, we see, witness and experience God’s glory.

When God reveals himself to us, those with faith perceive him as glorious. While his perfection in all things comes to us as holiness, his honour, majesty and power come to us as his glory. This glory can be overwhelming—in fact, in the Old Testament God’s glory is powerfully dangerous. Think of the impact of God’s honour, majesty and power on us should we perceive it uninhibited by any filters!

Our relationship of faith enables us to perceive the glory of God. But you have to know already that we can’t leave it there. It is never enough that our experience of God serves only our own needs and purposes. We are not forgiven because it makes us feel better about ourselves. We do not experience grace because our lives work better. Salvation is not for us alone. Likewise, there are greater purposes to our faith and God’s glory.

Our relationship of faith becomes the focal point of our relationships with others. Love and trust—and, in fact, the love and trust we have in God—is the model for our relationships with others. In relationship we communicate the relationship with God. Our very lives become the mirror through which we reflect the faith we have in God.

A necessary part of that mirror image is the glory of God. People are to see God's glory in, through and because of our lives. Will they have the faith to perceive it? I don't know, and that's not really the issue. The issue is that our lives reflect God's glory. His honour, majesty and power become visible through what we think, say and do.

In this way, God's glory becomes part of the proclamation of our faith. As we share our relationship with God with other people, they have the opportunity to experience God's glory. This is of fundamental importance.

You see, through faith we actually cooperate with God. Through faith we share in God's plan for all of creation. Through faith we serve God as his image-bearers and so become his most effective form of proclamation. Jesus preached his "Sermon on the Mount" to a small number of people at one time. Through us Jesus is speaking to millions of people throughout time.

God's glory is a part of that ongoing proclamation. Through faith we perceive God's glory and through faith that glory becomes a part of who we are, so that we may share that glory with others. Ultimately, we are a part of the glory of God as we cooperate with him in his plan of salvation.

In order to perceive this, we must stand in the relationship of faith with God. The relationship of love and trust in God gives us the ability to perceive God at work, in us and for the sake of others. It is only through faith that we may see God and share in his work. This is what we believe. This is what we know. This is who we are.

AMEN.