

Seventh Sunday of Easter

28.05.2017
By Pat Bennett

Introduction

Coming as it does at the end of the Easter Season, today's lectionary reading – part of Jesus' last conversation with his disciples prior to his arrest and crucifixion – may feel a little as though it is in the wrong place! However what John presents us with here is a summation of Jesus' mission as it has been unfolded through his Gospel narrative; and the theme of 'glorification' – though the word and idea may initially seem a little strange to us – also has something to say when we come to think about our involvement in conflict situations.

Anchor Question:

'Actions speak louder than words' is a common aphorism but to what extent is it true? Have you ever encountered a situation – in your own life or in a film or novel – where the real nature of a character or situation only becomes evident through their actions or through what eventually happens? What was that like? Was the revelation a surprise or were you (perhaps with hindsight!) able to pick up the signs along the way?

Text

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to

me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Comment

Whilst John's Gospel is often said to fall into two parts – the Book of Signs (Chapters 1–12) and the Book of Glory (Chapters 13– 21), the idea and language of glory are threads which weave through the whole of its narrative and play a key role in the way in which God is made known through the life, actions, and death of Jesus: John's great Prologue clearly and eloquently establishes the central role of the Incarnation in revealing God to the world: *'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'* (Jn 1:14). It is as the identity of Jesus becomes progressively recognised and accepted through the series of seven signs which John sets out, along with their associated 'I am' claims and the twists and turns of the ensuing dialogues, that the character of God is also revealed.

Thus we come to the language of glorification which is so prominent in this passage and the verb *doxazó* (to make renowned, render illustrious). In his Prologue John tells us that 'no one has ever seen God' (1:18); his Gospel then goes on to show how Jesus's life glorifies God by causing his character and worth to become visible to, and acknowledged by, the disciples (and others): *'now they know.....they have received them [the words which Jesus has from the Father] and know in truth* (vv, 7–8). In effect God becomes seen and thus knowable.

However Jesus and the disciples now stand at a cusp: the Incarnation as manifest through the particular story of the earthly life of Jesus is drawing to a close. *"And now I am no longer in the world"* says Jesus in v 11 as he moves towards his death (and to another and different way of revealing/glorifying God), resurrection, and ascension – through which his own divine nature will be decisively revealed and confirmed to his followers. However, unlike Jesus, the disciples *do* remain in the world (v.11b) and so the baton passes to them. As we heard in the Gospel reading for Ascension on Thursday, Jesus prepares the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit – the explosive enlivening which is going to send them out from Jerusalem into the wider world – by holding one last conversation in which he further illuminates and reinforces what they have come to understand about God. The task of glorification – making God known in the world – has now become theirs.

Is there anything in this passage – and in particular in the idea of 'glorification' – which can help us as we think about conflict? If we think of glorification in the terms of revelation outlined above then what Jesus does throughout John's Gospel, and what his disciples will go on to do through the post-Pentecost narrative set out in the Acts of the Apostles – is to make the reality of God, the nature of God, plain through word and action. Something which is hidden is brought into view and offers a different way of seeing and being in the world to those who encounter it. So we might ask ourselves – what narratives are being brought into view by the ways in which we engage in situations of conflict? Do our words and actions reveal the values which lie at the heart of the Gospel? Do they speak of love, of forgiveness, of an attitude of hospitable listening? Do they allow others to glimpse the possibility of a different way of seeing or responding to a situation? If not we might want to consider whether there are areas in our thinking or praxis where we need to do some further work to bring them into line with the values of the Kingdom.

We might also like to ask ourselves what mechanisms of accountability we have for this aspect of our lives: do we have trusted friends and companions of the way who can hold up a mirror for us and help us to see and reflect on what our words and actions say about that which lies at the heart of our own approach to life, and to the challenges which it brings?

Just as for the first disciples, the work of glorification of God – the revelation of the

divine nature and the shape and values of the Kingdom of Heaven – are part of the task which Jesus has bequeathed to us.

Response

Take some time to reflect on a situation (good or bad) in which you have recently been involved and bring to mind some of your responses. What was ‘glorified’ by the tone or content of your speech or by the shape of your actions? Do you feel that this is a true reflection of the values by which you want to live and act? If so – spend some time affirming and celebrating those values – but also think how you might make them more evident in your life. If not, then reconnect with and affirm that which you *do* want to glorify in the way you react, and think about how you might do that in future situations.

Prayer

Lord,
help me to live in such a way
that every word and action,
glorifies you
and makes you known.

Amen.