

Sunday after Ascension - 21st May 2023
St Mary's, Barnes, 10am

There's glory for you!' said Humpty Dumpty
'I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't
— till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument
for you!'"
'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice
objected.¹

So, what does the word glory mean? The collect for today addresses God as 'King of Glory.' It's a word that appears 165 times in the New Testament and which is crucial to the understanding of John's Gospel where it is used 18 times. Today's Gospel began with Jesus praying 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

I would suggest that for most people the word glory today has two main connotations, pre-eminence and splendour. We had a dramatic example of this glory at the recent coronation. There was pre-eminence, as displayed in the crowning of his majesty and there was splendour as seen in the processions, robes and jewels.

At this time of year in particular, with the trees now in their full fresh green, we catch a glimpse of glory in nature. We speak of a glorious day, or remark 'Isn't it glorious?' Edward Thomas begins his poem entitled 'Glory' with the line 'The glory of the beauty of the morning'. This reminds us that glory includes beauty, but it is more than that. It is that sublime union of beauty, goodness and truth which

¹ The dialogue continues

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you **can** make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master — that's all.'

does not just delight us and draw us out of ourselves but which is awesome.

In the beauty and grandeur of nature something of the Divine Glory comes through to us. But in the Old Testament and in John's Gospel in particular there is more to glory than that. Their glory is about the visible manifestation of divine majesty in acts of power. The majesty behind, beyond and within the universe is made manifest through some action or deed. So all the way through the Gospel of John that glory is revealed through various signs like the miracle at Cana of Galilee, the healing of a blind man and so on. This all comes to a great climax in the cross, resurrection and ascension, one act of glorification. This is the definitive action in which the Glory of God is revealed and in which Jesus is glorified. So, Jesus prays

I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work which you gave me to do; and now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world began.

So, we celebrate the fact that Christ has been glorified and therefore that heaven is above all characterised by glory-beauty, yes, truth, yes, goodness, yes, and the sublime conjunction of the three making up the realm of glory. The realm of glory which lights up the eyes, delights the heart and amazes us.

In the New Testament Jesus is called 'The Lord of Glory' and Paul writes of 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' On the mountain Peter, James and John had a glimpse of that glory when he was transfigured before them. In him they saw the glory of God.

But there is something else. Jesus not only reveals the glory of God, he reveals what it is to be a human being and therefore the potential glory of all human beings. In his letter to the Corinthians St Paul wrote

We all see, as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3, 18)

This has major implications not only for ourselves but for how we view the people around us. When we think of ourselves, we may think we are ordinary, limited, fallible, self-centred people but we are more than this, we are creatures of glory, designed to be transformed by and into the love of God. When we think of our fellow human beings, likewise we might think of them as ordinary, limited, fallible self-centred beings, but they too are creatures of glory, designed to be transformed by and into the love of God. No one put it more powerfully than C. S. Lewis. He wrote

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship....there are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations-these are mortal..but it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit- immortal horrors or everlasting splendours...If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way (as the Blessed Sacrament), for in him also Christ *vere latitat*-the glorifier and the glorified, Glory himself, is truly hidden.

I suppose that the characteristic attitude of our society now is that we are the product of a meaningless evolution, we live, we die, and we try to survive and make something of our lives in between. But that's it. The Christian faith says, yes, we are the product of evolution, but our final destiny lies beyond this world, and it is a glorious thing to be a human being. We are creatures made for glory and the risen, ascended glorified Lord is with us to carry us through.