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## **“The upside-down glory.” John 12:20-43**

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore, they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today the Church remembers Jesus’ triumphal entry in Jerusalem. Such a glorious event! Let’s talk about glory, shall we? John uses the word “glory” a lot in his Gospel account, as does Jesus as He speaks. But... What is this glory? What does it mean to be glorious? What does it mean to give glory? It is not that easy to provide a satisfying definition, but, perhaps, we can describe a certain field of meanings.

To give glory is about showing great admiration, great honour, praise, recognition and deep appreciation. Why would we give glory to anyone? Because they are glorious and worthy of great admiration, of great honour and praise, of recognition and so.

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Why would anyone be worthy of glory? When we excel, when we are superb, when we succeed magnificently, when we have attributes or traits of our character that are praiseworthy, admirable, honourable and commendable, lovely and perfect. I think this sums up the field of meaning for the word “glory” quite well.

Now, today I invite you to reflect on [1] **our thirst for glory**, and [2] **on the upside-down glory** and [3] **on the fullness of glory**. On our thirst for glory, on the upside-down glory that Jesus teaches and exemplifies, and on the fullness of glory for those who follow Jesus.

**First, our thirst for glory.** That is a real thing. We may know it under different names, such as longings for praise, appreciation, for noticing, for recognition, honouring, commending, etc. And we all crave for it in one way or another.

Just listen to this, imagine someone saying this to you, and observe how it feels: “You are such a faithful member of this congregation; I wish everyone was like you!” “You are always so kind and caring, I have never met a better and more caring person than you!”

“You are so hardworking, so committed, everyone should learn from you!” “You always stand up for what is true, without any fear, you are so courageous, so inspiring!” “You are so generous, with your time and means, that’s what all Christians should be like!”

This would be one of my favourites: “Pastor, you know how to explain Scripture so well, and your sermons are always so good!” And we can go on and on: “You are so faithful to the Lord, you are so caring for others, you are such an exemplary spouse and parent, you are so generous with your means, you are such a glorious being!”

This is all about the glorious you! How does it feel? Isn’t that great to have our thirst for glory satisfied? “Just give me more and I will do whatever you ask me!” This is true, the thirst for glory is one of the main driving forces of our lives.

Surely, it will be somewhat different for each one of us. Some may want to receive glory by being intellectually superior. Others may want to attain it with their achievements. For yet others it may be about accumulation of wealth and riches or gaining popularity or about living morally perfect and caring life, being the most altruistic person there is.

But... this is all about us, as Jesus said, about us loving our life, about us striving forward and upward, about building ourselves up, about establishing ourselves, about gaining name for ourselves, for we thirst for glory, significance, for recognition. We do.

And if we succeed in the above-mentioned efforts, it feels like then we can enjoy our life, we have made it, we are glorious! But here comes Jesus and turns everything upside down. **He teaches the upside-down understanding of glory.**

When the Greeks came seeking for Jesus, recognizing that He was someone special, what did Jesus say? **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** What did He mean? How did Jesus define glory? What did His disciples expect?

**“The hour has come to be glorified...”** To be glorified... This is what they witnessed. Jesus gets betrayed, arrested, beaten and mocked, treated unjustly as some criminal, dying naked

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on the cross, nails through His wrists and feet, struggling for the next breath of air, while being spat upon by ignorant, soulless and hateful mobs.

Okay, that's one way to go about glory. I bet that was not the first thought that crossed the disciples' minds. However, Jesus goes on and explains the logic of His understanding of glory. **"Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."** Great metaphor: unless the grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But... if it dies, there is abundant and glorious fruit.

In Jesus' definition, true glory is found not in seeking it, but in giving it up in obedience to the Father, giving up even His life for others. This is what He taught, not only in words, but in deeds. Jesus did die for us, and His death now brings salvation and new life to so many. He didn't hesitate to consider us as more significant than Himself.

By dying on behalf of God's beloved creatures, that is you, and being raised again, Jesus becomes the first fruits of God's abundant harvest. The second person of Trinity unites Himself with humanity, He becomes one of us, He **"falls into the earth and dies"** and as He is raised from the bondage of death, He pulls all of us to Himself.

What a beautiful picture it is! He goes first, the firstborn, the Head of His body, the Church, where we all are His members. The Head goes first and we all will follow Him, as one body, for we are united with Him, for His Spirit dwells in you as well.

And then Jesus invites us to follow Him on His glory road and to do likewise. **"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."** This is the invitation. Change the focus of your life!

Take your eyes off your self-interest, from your desires and thoughts and from your thirst for glory, and place Jesus Christ, your Lord and Master at the very centre of your life. Strive to live for Jesus serving your neighbours the way He instructs us. That's hard. That is not about us. We want that glory for ourselves.

Even in Jesus' days **"many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear... they did not confess it... [Why? Interesting!] ... for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."** (John 12:42-43) The same is true today. We thirst for that glory. From men. We want it now!

Wherever we believe we may get it, that pulls us like a magnet. Would living as a faithful disciple of Jesus give us that glory from men? What do you think? Are we rewarded with worldly glory if we want to listen to Jesus and to live as the Holy Spirit wisely instructs us?

Are you praised in this world if you want to hold to the truth of the Scripture, and if you want to obey God more than men? What happens if you want to follow Christ and not the culture, to listen to the Word and not to the world, if you want to deny yourself and give glory to the One who died so that you could live? How does that go? Will that bring recognition among the mighty of this world? Will it bring wealth, or popularity among crowds?

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Or praise from men for being faithful? Unlikely, very unlikely. If you follow Jesus, instead of glory you may receive disrespect and criticism. Instead of praise there may be rejection and loss. Instead of happily ever after, expect afflictions. What to make of this? Was Jesus wrong? Is Jesus' way of glory not working?

On the contrary, it is **the only way that leads to the fullness of true glory!** And this is how it works, and this is why it works better than any other alternative. We need to know this, that our longing for glory is God given. He has built it in us. Yes, that is true. There is nothing wrong with it. Because you are created to be glorious beings, created in God's Image, for glorious lives, and one day His work with you will be finished.

Even now, if you have listened to what Jesus said, if you have taken it seriously, if you have tried to follow Him, if you are here, it means that God's creative power is already transforming you into the Image of Jesus from one degree of glory to another.

Something is being done to you while you may not have even noticed it. The Spirit is restoring and perfecting you, He is chiselling away the rot of sin, often using trials and tribulations of this life, and planting the love for God's Law in your hearts, He is making you more glorious, increasingly excellent, less selfish, more magnificent, ever closer to what He intended you to be, a person after His own heart. He works to glorify you.

Do you know the principle, that the more significant the person who recognizes you and who honours you, the more glory you receive? Now, remember what Jesus says: **"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him."** The Father will honour him...

Now get this! As you follow Jesus, as you carry your cross, you are already honoured by the most glorious being, the Triune God. He looks at you and sees you united with Jesus, clothed in His holiness, more glorious than you realize, and He delights in you: "You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased." Whatever glory someone may find in this world, it doesn't last. It doesn't satisfy.

It is so different with the honour and glory that the Triune God gives you. As Paul wrote: **"This light momentary affliction [that we may experience following Jesus] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."** (2 Cor 4:17) Eternal weight of glory!

You are on your way to share the eternal glory of the Risen Son Jesus, to be transformed into that glorious, magnificent, superb being that God designed you to be. So, dear fellow "little grains", may our glorious Lord help us not to search glory for ourselves in vain in this world.

May He help us to follow Him, to fall into the earth, to die to ourselves and to live for Him, so that our fruits are many and we can share Jesus' glory beyond all comparison. For the day is coming when you will enter heavenly Jerusalem. Triumphant. It will be a glorious day.

Amen.