

Sermon for 21 May 2023
(Easter 7, Year A)

“All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.” Words from our gospel, John 17.10.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit. Amen.

Keeping a classicist at home can have its uses. We’ve spent some time this week comparing the classical Greek uses of the word “δοξα”, or “glory”, with the New Testament usage, since so many variations of the word appear in this week’s gospel reading. For instance, “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee”; and a few verses later, “I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; **5** and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.”

I realise that with so many classicists in the room, I may be going out dangerously far on a thin limb here, but I am given to understand that the earliest uses of “δοξα” meant not “glory” but rather “expectation”, and “hope”. These uses occurred, for instance, in the Iliad, the Odyssey, and Herodotus. Later, “δοξα” came to be used as “opinion” and “judgement”; also “fancy” or “vision” in the poetic sense, and sometimes “the opinion others had of one”, or “estimation”, or “repute”. It is a short hop from the positive sense of “reputation” to “glory”, if you aren’t using the knowing English senses of “he has a bit of a reputation”. But it is that earliest usage of “δοξα” as “expectation” and “hope” that seems to chime so well with this little season of waiting in which we find ourselves, the period between Ascension Day and Pentecost.

Our Lord’s glorious resurrection and ascension having been accomplished, we might feel odd hanging about for the Holy Spirit to appear and give the disciples those gifts they need to begin the work of the church. But, looking at where this gospel passage lies - chapter 17, before the Passion even begins - we may better understand the flavour of our own waiting. The disciples, like us, have everything they need. They have been given a full picture by Jesus, information about who he is, and they should therefore be equipped to go out and spread the gospel. But they have not yet seen what they need to truly *understand*: they have not seen the crucifixion or the resurrection, and so they have not understood that his great love, the love of the Father, has defeated death. And so they cannot yet begin going out to do his work.

So they wait, as we wait for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. But waiting does not need to be inactive. Our Christian lives are made up of moments of prayer and devotion that may seem small, but which build together over time a life of love and truth, a pattern of following our Lord’s example. Our waiting is not in the sense of “wait a minute!” shouted upstairs to children, which means “stop what you’re doing

until I get there!" We wait actively in expectation and hope, watching and praying in anticipation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The student group and I have lately spent some hours engaging in the practice of Lectio Divina, which is very much about waiting for the Spirit's action by leaving silence between readings of a passage, allowing words and phrases to emerge and catch our notice. Last week, reflecting on that day's Epistle, we encountered a little parallel with this period between Ascension and Pentecost in Acts 8.

You may remember from last week: Phillip has proclaimed the Messiah to a brand-new Christian community in Samaria, and he has been busy in that community baptising and casting out "unclean spirits" which emerged "with loud shrieks". The people of the city have rejoiced greatly. The passage paints a loud picture of what is going on, and then pivots; for into this scene come the apostles Peter and John, who lay hands on the new believers, and pray for them, and they receive the Holy Spirit. These people, interestingly, had not been baptised with a trinitarian formula, as the church has nearly always done - only baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. And so, lacking the words "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" at their baptism, they had not yet entered into any relationship with the Spirit. The spirit, the writer of Acts explicitly said, had not yet come down on them.

It is hard to imagine a baptism *without* that invocation, or any part of the Christian life without this person of the Trinity who is so much part of our language about and our experience of our Christian life. Now, today is definitely not the day for a sermon on the Holy Spirit: you will have to wait for Pentecost. But we can think about the quiet way in which the Spirit is invoked, and prayed for, and then sent down on that community at Samaria. We can imagine the richness of Christian life that begins to unfurl after its arrival, not the loud bangs and whizzes of demons being cast out, or the initial rush of initiation that happened under Phillip's aegis, but the quiet, daily prayer life that sustains us all. It begins by being prayed for, much as Jesus prays for his disciples in our gospel passage today.

Cyril of Alexandria, in his commentary on this gospel passage, writes that "When an occasion calls us to prayer, it is fitting for us to pray for that which increases God's glory before we pray for that which concerns ourselves".

In this little time of waiting before Pentecost, we have the chance to reflect on Jesus' words to his Father, spoken with such love for his disciples. And take his pattern of praying to the Father, for others, as our own. We have the chance to gradually unfurl our hearts and minds, opening them to the quiet voice of the Spirit, only audible when we stop to notice. We can take time to embrace all senses of that small word "δοξα": hope, anticipation, vision, glory.

As he prays for the disciples, Jesus is also praying for us, and we who are left with his prayer are reminded that we belong to him. "All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." So let us pray for each other in this quiet time, that

we might through simple love for each other glorify our Lord, who loved us first and loved us best.

Amen.