

To God be the Glory

1 Peter 4:8-11
November 21, 2021

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

How did you like that Choral Introit today and the new “Holy, Holy, Holy”? That piece of music is actually titled “Sanctus,” which is the word for “holy” in Latin. Singing the Sanctus is the traditional response of the people during the communion service when the minister lifts up praise and thanksgiving to God. Writing on the history and power of liturgy, author Glenn Byer says, “It is almost as if the people can’t stand it another moment and need to get into the act of praising God.”¹ Well, that makes sense. The origin of the “Sanctus” is found in Isaiah 6, verse 3, where the prophet echoes the proclamation of God’s heavenly host who sing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

In today’s New Testament lesson, Peter sees the church as reason to sing God’s praises and glory. Specifically, he’s looking upon the 1st century churches of Asia Minor and instructing them in how to be a church that reflects God’s glory. He encourages them – and us – to live in such a way “that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.” The best way for us to glorify God is through our love of God and love of neighbor.

Speaking of such love, Peter says, “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.” In other words, our love of God and neighbor is what covers, overshadows and overcomes the sinful, misguided ways of the world, helping God’s glory to shine in the darkness.

The only way we can reflect the glory of God as a church is by building up and maintaining ministry programs that become an outpouring of God’s grace and love. In order to help us do that Peter points to four things that are especially important in helping churches to reflect the glory of God. They are hospitality, stewardship, service and gifts, or talents. “Be hospitable to one another without complaining,” says Peter. This is because hospitality was an important Christian virtue back then as it is today.

David L. Bartlett, writing in the New Interpreter’s Bible, says, “Hospitality included ... the willingness to serve as host for one’s fellow Christians in worship and fellowship....”

So, one key way that we reflect the glory of God is through all that we do to ensure our church continues to offer worship services and fellowship events. Pretty cool, right? Knowing that God is glorified through us – through our presence at worship and fellowship events. That’s awesome.

¹ <https://www.ocp.org/en-us/blog/entry/sanctus-holy-holy-holy>.

After encouraging us to keep up the good work of worship and fellowship, Peter urges us onward and upward, saying, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” In that one sentence we have stewardship, service and giftedness, which are the other three ways we as the church reflect the glory of God.

The gifts and talents you use in order to be an active member of First church – they are a reflection of God’s glory. God’s glory; not ours. If we make it about us, then church work becomes arduous; it saps our energy, spiritually.

But if we make it about God, then church work is spiritually invigorating, both for us and for the community of faith, even if we do go home tired physically. As Peter says, “Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.”

That’s a great reminder for us. If you’re concerned about having the time and energy to take on a ministry role here at church, join the club. Everyone serving here is giving of themselves beyond what they believe possible, and getting back all the more! There’s nothing like showing up and having God fill your cup, having God fill you with energy, enthusiasm and joy. I recommend it, for all of us, for all of you.

The next time you’re called to serve, give it some real consideration, put your trust in God, and if there be a way forward, go for it. You won’t be disappointed. That’s what Peter says about using our gifts and talents in service to the church.

As for stewardship, Peter ties stewardship to what he calls the “manifold grace of God.” When you bring your pledge card to the Lord’s Table today, that act of stewardship reflects your faith in the unimaginable, undeserved, unwavering grace of God.

When you or someone else is fed by the church – body and/or soul – it’s only by the grace of God that we are able to provide that. Our Thanksgiving Box Lunch is a good example. It’s a testament to the grace of God flowing out from this church to everyone here today and to countless folks out in the community who might otherwise go without.

When you or anyone else receives the care and support of this church, it becomes a true sharing in the grace of God, whether that’s through your outpouring of love and concern for one another or through the financial assistance and guidance of the church.

When our hearts and minds are fed through worship and Sunday school – that wouldn’t happen for us or anyone else without your gracious financial support.

And finally, when the pastor cuts his sermon short so you can spend some time eating together before coming back to help decorate the church, well, there's hardly a more gracious act than that, now is there? Just kidding. I've got 10 more minutes. No, just kidding.

Let's wrap things up, knowing that our active participation in the life of First Church – through our time and talents and treasures – is not only important to the church, but it's important to God, you are important to God and God's work.

So let that assurance give rise to our thanksgivings today and everyday, giving thanks to the Lord for all the ways we get to participate in God's work, God's vision of the glory that is to come. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Loving God, we come to you in gratitude for your love, which is always present to us. In the stillness of these moments, we remember with thanksgiving the times when your love has enabled us to rise to our better selves.

We remember, too, the times when we have acted in ways that were less than loving and gracious. Breathe in us new life, making us joyful for the opportunity to try again, to do better.

Empowered by your love, O God, let us be a channel for your care and compassion.

Where there is injury and hurt, let there be healing.

Where there is anger, send the Spirit of your love.

Where there is grief and sorrow, confusion and upset, send your Spirit of peace and the assurance of your faithful presence.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus, who makes your presence known the world over, and who taught us to pray to you saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.