

## **The Doxa Deo**

John 17:20-26

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### **I.**

If you happened to take a glance this week at the liturgical calendar, you know that today is the last Sunday in Easter, or Easter Tide. Next week is Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the only Sunday of the year that the choir and I get to wear our red stoles. The following Sunday is Trinity Sunday. A day we lift up the idea that the one God has been made known to us in three distinct ways: as God who Creates us, as Jesus, the Christ, who redeems or saves us, and, as of Pentecost, the Spirit which sustains us.

Rather than look ahead to all of that, however, this morning our scripture passage from John's Gospel, 17:20-26 calls us to look back once again to the Last Supper. Because, if we seek to fully understand the notion of the Trinity, and the profundity of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in our world, we must first fully understand the events that took place that evening.

### **II.**

It is the night of Passover, our Maundy Thursday, and Jesus has gathered in an upper room with his friends and family. What is the first thing he does? Before Jesus gives them the great commandment to love one another just as he has loved us. Before telling Phillip that he will do whatever is asked if it is asked in God's name. Before assuring Thomas that he will return for them all and take them home. Before he confronts Peter's boasting with the knowledge that he will deny him three times before the cock crows. Before he tells them that there is one here who will betray him. Even before he blesses and breaks the bread and wine, what is it that John's Gospel tells us Jesus does first. Jesus took off his robe, tied a towel around himself, poured water into a basin, and knelt before each of the disciples, and he washed their feet. And then, after all these things occurred, Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed.

### III.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

*“I ask not only on behalf of these gathered here, but also on behalf of those to come who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, God, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

*God, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ‘Righteous God, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these (people here) know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you’ve loved me may be in them, and I in them.’ ”*

And after praying these words, Jesus went out to the Garden of Gethesmene to be arrested.

### IV.

In the midst of all that had happened, and all that was about to happen to him, Jesus pauses to ask something from God. Not courage or strength for himself to face the cross, no. But, rather, that a gift be given to those gathered around the table that night, those who believed because they have seen. He also asked that the same gift be given to you gathered right here today, we who have come to believe *because* of the words of those that have seen. Imagine, the night of the Last Supper, Jesus paused and offered up a prayer for *you*. Just minutes before he was betrayed and arrested, Jesus asks that you should receive a gift today, and the gift is this: that the glory which God has given to Jesus, also now be given *to each of us*.

### V.

In the Greek: *doxa deo*, the glory of God. Given to *us*, that we *too* may have the brightness, the splendor, the radiance, the magnificence of God. Why? Why would Jesus want this for us? Because he likes us? Yes, moreover he loves us! Yet, that’s not all. Jesus is also after something else. Not only does Jesus want us to have the glory of God, Jesus also wants us to be glorious for God. Jesus wants us to have God’s glory because through it,

we all may be completely one. Jesus desires a oneness of believers, a community of completeness, because only such a community - filled with the presence and love of God - will be able to reveal to the world that God is the one who has sent Jesus to love the people, and share the Glory.

## **VI.**

However, to be that community, to show that oneness and reveal to the world God's purposes, Jesus now asks of us that we be glorious for God. So let's all be glorious, shall we! Let us be radiant and splendid, let us be bright and magnificent! But how do we do that? What does that look like?

In John 13:14, Jesus tells us:

*If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

The *doxa deo*, the Glory of God, is the glory of service to another. This is the example Jesus has set for us. And all for one simple reason: so that in being glorious *for* God by serving others, we show the world God's loving presence.

## **VII.**

It is through this Christ-like example, and *only* through this example that the world might come to believe, and may come to be made one, *in* God's glory through Christ whom we exemplify. I am *well* aware that when it is said in this way the commandment to love one another begins to seem like a mighty tall order and a very heavy lift. After all, it is nothing less than the fate of the world which is at stake.

I often say that caring for people always comes at a cost, and this is very true. However, the actual caring *for* people, the lifting and bearing *of* such a cross, should always feel as a delight and not as a burden. Which is how we know we are right in doing the right thing.

## **VIII.**

This past Tuesday I officiated the graveside service for Alice Poole. Alice was a long-time member of our congregation. Some years back she moved

south to escape the winter and be closer to family, though her heart always belonged here on the Park with this church family. Among the very many ways Alice contributed to the work and mission of our church, she was a master quilter and often donated the fruits of her craft to our annual Fall Bazaar. For a time, Alice was also the church's Office Coordinator.

Moreover, Alice was a member of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) which brought me and Linda to the church 27 years ago. I remember quite vividly that after returning from my first interview trip to Canton, and while things were *very* much in flux as to if we would actually end up in Canton, Alice sent me a very lovely letter which expressed her belief that God was calling me here to the Church on the Park. It is hard for me to overstate just how much her words meant to me at that moment.

## **IX.**

Prior to leaving for the cemetery I went up to the church kitchen to thank those who were preparing the lunch that was to be served to Alice's family and friends following the committal. What I found there in no way surprised me, but it did totally amaze me; as this congregation has always done this past quarter century. Now, putting on a meal for forty people is no small task, as Christa, Pat, Jean, Barb, Erin, Claire, Vivian, and Faye can surely well attest. You would never know it, though, from the laughter, warmth, and joy that pervaded the kitchen that morning. To say it is a labor of love, doesn't really do the act justice, as it fails to give full expression to both the degree of labor involved, and the magnitude of love which inspires it. As they toiled there in the kitchen there was no thought to what else they could be doing on such a beautiful day, and no sense of strain from the weight of the work.



## **X.**

Instead, what I witnessed felt more akin to a combination of joy and what I can only describe as “rightness.” What was displayed to me that day, and what each one of them clearly felt so very deeply and reflected ever so clearly, was the *Doxa Deo*, the glory of God.

Now, there is no real mystery here. All of you know what I’m talking about. Those who help with the brunches and rummage sales, those who endeavor to keep the church buildings up to snuff, serve as Deacons, Elders, and on committees, those who pray, send cards or notes and visit people in their homes and hospital, those who make meals for folks who are ill, rehabilitating, or with newborn child, those who sing in the choir, grill hamburgers for a Session meeting, tend the garden, attend worship, offer support, welcome warmly, those who contribute time, energy and resources, those near and far who hold this church and her people in their heart, you know what I’m talking about as you, too, feel the *Doxa Deo*.

## **XI.**

Do we *have* to do any of this? No, but nevertheless we do. Do we collapse in our chair at day’s end? Yes, but it is a “good” tired. Does helping with these things at the church mean there were lots of others things we may not get to do for ourselves, either on our own “To Do” lists or for our own enjoyment? Yes, but we do these things anyway; we have a choice, and this is what we choose. And, as we do all of this, we feel both a joy and a “rightness” about ourselves and our place in the world; we feel the *Doxa Deo*, the Glory of God. We are foot washers extraordinaire, radiant and splendid, bright and magnificent. Amen.