

Back in the late 1960's my mother wore a little black doily on her head when we went to church. When I asked her why, she said it was because a woman's hair was her glory so she needed to cover it in church. The thought was that a woman's hair was a potential source of pride and covering it was a sign of her humility. Which in turn meant that your glory meant your source of pride.

On an internet search looking for the proper name for those little doilies, I was surprised to find lots of Christian women discussing veiling in worship. In this decade there's been more public discussion on veiling for Muslim women so I was surprised to find this debate is alive and well among Christians, mostly among Roman Catholic baby boomers. Who like me, went to church in the 60's when women still veiled.

The comments were very thoughtful, questioning why and when women stopped wearing veils. Some of them had decided to take up the practice to enhance their experience of worship. Some were honoring what they saw as a Biblical directive. A few said wearing a veil gave them a deeper focus and enhanced their participation in worship. Almost all worried about what other people would think and had advice for how to veil discretely with a scarf so as to pass for a merely stylish woman. One, a former catholic wanted to know if it was okay to veil in an Anglican church.

In all of the comments I could see the tension between craving a deeper sense of the presence of God and the approval or disapproval of other people.

One tried the practice faithfully for about six months. This woman had an epiphany on a day when she forgot her veil in the car. She had a choice to make, go to her car to get the veil and miss worship, or go into worship unveiled. She made the choice of sitting outside of the sanctuary instead of going in unveiled. and later she wrote:

“It was then I realized things had gotten out of hand. In my effort to do the right thing, I had gotten so caught up in form, that it had gotten in the way of my taking place in the public prayer life of my community...I realized that, just as wearing a covering can be a sign of humility, it can also be a source of pride.

<http://www.webring.org/l/rd?ring=catholic;id=138;url=http%3A%2F%2Fstreams.ofmercy%2Eblogspot%2Ecom%2F2006%2F05%2Fshould-i-cover-my-hair-god-part-deux%2Ehtml>

What does glory mean? Is it just another way of describing pride? It commonly means to earn attention and honor from others. And this is certainly what Jesus had done on his way to the cross.

When the Pharisees see the enormous crowd of people welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, they throw up their hands and say “Look! The world has gone after him.” Jesus has become a sensation; he has earned public acclaim and honor. His work has been recognized as a notable achievement, people are not only welcoming him, they are clamoring for him. He has risen to glory and prominence in the eyes of the Roman world.

I wonder if his friends were proud of him? He was doing amazing work and changing the way people thought, transforming peoples lives. I imagine they were...what is there not to be proud of? Feeding people, healing people, raising people from the dead.

So his disciples who have worked alongside him are stunned and cannot fully comprehend when Jesus tells them he is about to leave this all behind. They don't want to hear that he will be crucified and will rise to new life.

The disciples have such a hard time understanding what Jesus is doing with his recent popularity and fame. They have a different understanding of what glory is and what one should do with it.

To demonstrate a new understanding of what being glorified means Jesus celebrates a meal with his friends and then he gets up from the table, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, and begins to wash his disciples feet, drying them with the towel that was tied around him.

God is glorified not through the esteem of other people, but through through gentle, humble, sacrificial action.

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.”

Here is how Eugene Peterson unravels this somewhat cryptic statement:

“Now the son of man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God’s glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified, glory all around!”

God’s glory then, is God showing his holy presence on earth. God’s glory is a revelation of God in the world. This is what the Psalmist is celebrating today, God’s presence and goodness and magnificence as revealed in nature. God’s presence shining on earth through his creation.

And now God’s presence and goodness and magnificence has been revealed in Jesus. In his humble sacrificial action.

Judas has just gone out...Jesus knows his time with his disciples is short so he tells them that his death and resurrection will be God’s way of revealing Godself to the world.

The glory of God then is God's ultimate demonstration of the power to create and transform life as we know it.

Although it helps to think about and talk about what Jesus means by glorifying God, it's really Jesus' actions that give us the full picture. We then are asked to likewise take action.

Jesus says;

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Not if you understand things correctly, pray in the right way, not if you wear the right kind of covering on your head, not if you eat the right food or believe the right things...if you have love for one another. And even more, if you can demonstrate love for one another.

Just as Jesus has revealed God to the world, we are to reveal God to one another through our love.

I want to share with you something that I heard in a recent documentary I watched on the life and work of Father Thomas Keating. One of his students described the impact of Keating's teaching on meditation for his life.

He told Father Keating, "This is my meditation, I breathe in God and I breath out sin. Father Keating said to me...why don't you try breathing in God and breathing out love? And that suggestion changed my life, it was a source of complete transformation!"

(Thomas Keating: A Rising Tide of Silence)

So I tried it, and what I like about this practice is that it reminds me that every moment of every day, I can fill myself with the very presence of God, and as I breathe out, I can breathe God's love into the world, into the people I meet and the places I go, into joyful, difficult or even completely mundane places.

It is almost impossible to not feel a sense of joy as you repeat this simple prayer, breathing in God, breathing out love.

It is so simple and yet so profound.

When we allow the love of God to take root inside of us and to spread outside of ourselves we give witness to something way beyond talking about it. We begin to reveal God's love and hope for a new way of being and his glory shines through us making his presence known.

Amen