

Year B, March 18, 2018
5 Lent
Christ Church, Mexia

“Actor Kevin Bacon recounted when his six-year-old son saw *Footloose* for the first time:

He said, ‘Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you swing from the rafters of that building? That’s really cool, how did you do that?’ I said, ‘Well, I didn’t do that part ... it was a stunt man.’ ‘What’s a stunt man?’ he asked. ‘That’s someone who dresses like me and does things I can’t do.’ ‘Oh,’ he replied and walked out of the room looking a little confused.

A little later he said, ‘Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you spin around on the gym bar and land on your feet? How did you do that?’ I said, ‘Well, I didn’t do that. It was a gymnastics double.’ ‘What’s a gymnastics double?’ he asked. ‘That’s a guy who dresses in my clothes and does things I can’t do.’ There was a silence from my son, then he asked in a concerned voice, ‘Dad, what did you do?’ ‘I got all the glory,’ I sheepishly replied.

That’s the grace of God in our lives. Jesus took our sin upon himself and did what we couldn’t do. We stand forgiven and bask sheepishly triumphant in Jesus’ glory.” - according to Joel Sarrault.

And what is glory? I’m sure that we may have many different answers for that question. Just as I’m sure that the disciples, and maybe even the Greeks – depending upon their prior knowledge of Jesus – may have had different thoughts about what he meant by it being time for the Son of Man to be glorified.

According to William Barclay, the term “Son of Man” took its origin from Daniel 7:13. He explains: “The point of the passage is this. In Daniel 7:1-8, the writer has been describing world powers which have held sway – the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians. They were so cruel, so savage and so sadistic that they could be described only with the imagery of wild animals – the lion with the eagle’s wings, the bear with the three ribs between its teeth, the leopard with the four wings and the four heads, and the terrible beast with iron teeth and ten horns. These were the symbols of the powers that had hitherto held sway. But it was the dream of the seer that into the world was going to come a new power, and that power

was to be gentle and humane and gracious, so that it could be depicted under the symbol not of a savage animal but of a man. This passage means that the day of savagery would pass and the day of humanity was coming.

That was the dream of the Jews, the golden age, when life would be sweet and they would be masters of the world. But how was that age to come? It became clearer and clearer to them that their nation was so small and their power so weak, that the golden age could never come by human means and human power; it must come by the intervention of God. (God) would send (a) champion to bring it in. So they thought back to the picture in the book of Daniel, and what more natural than that they should call the champion the *Son of Man*. The phrase which had once been merely a symbol came to describe a person. ... Amid their troubles and their sufferings, in their subjections and their slaveries, the Jews never forgot and never gave up their dream ... the day will come when God will release him and (the Son of Man) will come with divine power against which no individual and no kingdom will be able to stand, and smash the way to world empire for the Jews."

So imagine their surprise when Jesus presents the amazing paradox of the grain of wheat. The listeners most likely are thinking the Son of Man will be glorified through the conquest of the kingdoms of the world by the conquering armies of God. How can they hear that by glorified, Jesus meant dying? So those sentences which followed must have seemed incredulous to them. As Barclay says, "We will never understand Jesus, nor the attitudes of the Jews to him, until we understand how he turned their ideas upside down, replacing a dream of conquest with a vision of a cross."

The same is probably as true of us today. Joan Chittister cites the research done by the Center for the Study of Social and Political Change at Smith College several years ago which showed that "the values that drive modern society (our society) ... are these: profit, personal comfort, exploitation, control, individualism, and domination. We are taught in our time, in other words, to want money, to retire at the earliest possible age, to get ahead whatever the cost to others, to win at any cost, to worship at the altar of the self and to be in control of everything and everyone at all times. ... Those values (Joan says) are a recipe for extinction. Those values are a blueprint for human destruction. They are precisely the values that have destroyed the rainforests and melted the polar ice cap and left peasant farmers without land and babies of color dead in their mother's bony arms, and left old women to sleep in public parks and put half the preschool children of the United States in poverty, and left 20 million hungry and 40 million people without health insurance (pre-Obama care), ...in the richest nation in the world."

These are not the values of Jesus. These are not the values that bring glory. Chuck Holsinger tells the following story of one of his Wheaton College classmates: "It was 1944 and my friend, Bert Frizen, was an infantryman on the front lines in Europe. American forces had advanced in the face of intermittent shelling and small-arms fire throughout the morning hours, but now all was quiet. His patrol reached the edge of a wooded area with an open field before them. Unbeknownst to the Americans, a battery of Germans was ready and waiting in a hedgerow about 200 yards across the field.

Bert was one of the two scouts who moved out into the clearing. Once he was half-way across the field, the remainder of his battalion followed. Suddenly the Germans opened fire and machine gun fire ripped into both of Bert's legs. The American battalion withdrew into the woods for protection, while a rapid exchange of fire continued.

Bert lay helplessly in a small stream as shots volleyed overhead from side to side. There seemed to be no way out of his dilemma. To make matters worse, he now noticed a German soldier was crawling toward him. Death appeared imminent; he closed his eyes and waited. To his surprise a considerable period passed without the expected attack, so he ventured opening his eyes again. He was startled to see the German kneeling at his side, smiling. He then noticed that the shooting had stopped. Troops from both sides of the battlefield watched anxiously. Without any verbal exchange, this mysterious German reached down to lift Bert into his strong arms, and proceeded to carry him to the safety of his (American) comrades.

Having accomplished his self-appointed mission, and still without speaking a word, the German soldier turned and walked back across the field to his own troops. No one dared to break the silence of this sacred moment. Moments later the cease-fire ended, but not before all those present had witnessed the power of self-abdicating love, how one man risked everything for his enemy. (This is an example of glory.)

Bert's life was saved through the compassion of one man, his enemy (the Other). This courageous act pictures, I think, what Jesus risked for us. While we were still God's enemies (the Other), Christ died for us."

In the amazing paradox of this morning's gospel lesson, Jesus was telling us three things: 1) only through death comes life – we have to die to ourselves, forget our own ambitions and goals, in order for God to use us, 2) only by spending our life do we retain it – we owe everything to those men and women who gave up personal safety, security, and selfish gain to serve

God and others, and 3) only by service comes greatness – who are the people you love and admire? Think about the reason for your admiration. And let's not forget that love is the only true wealth of life.

The cross is the antithesis of our cultural values – the antithesis. But the cross is the way to all for which we could ever hope or dream. Glory is NOT the acquisition of power or monetary wealth, nor the ability to control your destiny, nor to receive awards and public recognition, according to Jesus, but rather the ability to serve others for a greater purpose. It was expressed so eloquently in the second verse of Hymn 149 that we sang for the Processional this morning:

“So daily dying to the way of self,
So daily living to your way of love,
We walk the road, Lord Jesus, that you trod...”

Maybe, like the German soldier, we more frequently can find ways to help others in the chaos of our daily lives – despite the risks or the costs – and adopt and maintain the true vision of the cross.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit. Amen