

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan Jr.

Sermon Text: John 7:10-31

Sermon Title: "Glory Seeking" (Trekking through the Gospel of John - Pentecost)

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Whenever we have to go somewhere and meet new people, whether it is at a wedding reception or a funeral lunch or some other party, there are two things we always ask people: "What's your name?" and "What do you do for a living?" Obviously we have to get the person's name, so we know what to call him or her. We don't want to keep saying "You" the entire night. But then we must know what they do for a living, because we tend to think an occupation defines who a person is. If he or she does similar work as we do, then we have something to talk about – we can connect with these people. If he or she does something interesting like work as a Secret Service agent to the previous president or fly commercial airplanes for Delta, then we want to know more – we think the conversation will be fascinating. And if people walk up to me and discover I am a pastor, they usually say, "Oh, really. That's nice," and the conversation dies.

People in John 7 want to know who Jesus is. They want to know who he is *and* what he is up to. Some

people say that Jesus is good. He is a good man, agreeable, upright, distinguished. You don't have to worry about him. But other says the opposite. They say he is deceitful, leading people astray with false words. People sit in opposing camps when it comes to defining who Jesus is. Yet, they do not reveal their thoughts to anybody else in their own camp or in the opposite camp, because they don't want to be lumped in with Jesus and thus be called deceitful. Or, they don't want to speak ill of Jesus, and have crowds of people in arms against them.

C.S. Lewis once said, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic... or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God."¹

"Who is this Jesus?" the people wonder in John 7?

We know from the very beginning of John's Gospel that Jesus is the Word, the Logic, the Reason for life. All things were created through him and even for him.

¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

Christ was in the beginning with God the Father – and don't forget, God the Holy Spirit – before everything was made.² So we can understand what Jesus is saying, when he tells the crowds, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”³ The Word was with God, and is God, since the beginning.

When everybody wonders how Jesus can speak so eloquently about the things of God without any formal training a Rabbi might have gone through, Jesus refers to God the Father, because they are one. Later in the conversation, Jesus says that he knows God, because the Father sent the Son into the world to save it, not condemn it. Back in Chapter 6 of John, Jesus says, “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” And back in Chapter 5 he says, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever [the Father] does, the Son also does in like manner.”⁴

It is not from a formal education or under the tutelage of a prominent Rabbi, but from God personally. This is how Jesus is able to speak, and act, and give himself to others as Lord and Savior.

The interesting thing about Jesus' statement,

² Cf. John 1:1-5.

³ John 7:16 (NKJV).

⁴ John 7:29, 6:57, and 5:19, respectively.

though, is that he could have spoken on his own behalf. He could have done things as to bring all the attention on him. Is not Jesus Christ God? And so, if God the Father and God the Son are one (along with God the Holy Spirit), then Jesus could actually preach his own doctrine, because it is God's doctrine, right? Anything he did on earth, he did as God incarnate; so his will would be God's will naturally. His words would be God's words, even though Jesus says, "The Son can only do what the Father does."

Jesus is making a major point here, by not taking all the glory for himself. He says what he says to prove that he is as much of a Servant to the Father as any one of us should be. Jesus is never going to say, "This is *my* doctrine that *I* share with you, so accept it," because he doesn't want to set himself up as God without God the Father or the Holy Spirit. Crowds of people could have easily separated Jesus from God, and worshipped him as an idol. At one point, they wanted to make him their king, believing he was some superman who crashed to earth and was now rocking the world with his words and actions. Not even Jesus will take all the glory, grab all the attention, without God the Father, although he was God incarnate.

So Jesus uses words such as, "I do what the Father wills," and "I abide in the Father, and the

Father abides in me.” “My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me.”

And just as Jesus, God the Son, is a Servant, he places the burden on us to be God’s servants as well. “If anyone wills to do [God’s] will, he [or she] will know concerning the doctrine whether it is from God, or I speak on my own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but he who speaks seeks the glory of the One who sent him is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.” Jesus not only speaks of himself as the One who seeks God’s glory, but us as well, because we fit into the category of those who wish to do the will of God. We are lumped in with Jesus who wish to glorify God’s name. We too want to be sent out by God to do the things of God. Whatever they may be, however hard or easy they may be, our hope is to do what it takes to get his message heard, and for people to turn to God through Christ.

The message we carry in our bones strikes loudly against the message of our social and economic systems. We live in a world in which it is all about ME, the great ME who has to look out for himself or herself. The all-important ME only cares about his or her successes, and has no time for anybody else.

Last Tuesday I was driving to the church, and I

heard a radio report about certain state governments wanting to cut certain people out of medical benefits and social programs, because budgets need to be met. They want to make cuts across the board that will affect many people, old and young, who may not have the means to support themselves. The government doesn't want to be charitable – it looks out for its own interests, and in turn each politicians is looking out for his or her own interests, which involves saying anything to get re-elected and pushing through their million dollar pet projects on every vote. People see what they do, and they don't act any more charitably. People look out for our own interests. They should pursue their own goals without concern for anybody else.

I've been reading a book called *Poverty in America*, and at one point it talked about societies' perception of poverty. In colonial America back in the 1600s, people were thought to be in two categories of poverty: the voluntary poor which meant they could work for themselves but chose not to, and so they would be thrown into poor houses or jails to work off their debts; and the non-voluntary poor which means people couldn't work to save themselves, so they were allowed to panhandle. What I gleaned from this book is that our perceptions are no different today. In fact,

in our ME generation Americans in general think that there are no non-voluntary poor people in our society. People choose to be poor or not, and those who are poor are a disgrace. The general public sees people as lazy bums who can work but choose not to, and thus strap the rest of us who pay taxes. And then we throw in the American Work Ethic and the American Dream, and we see everybody – those who may be poor or those who are not – are capable to direct their own destinies. They should be capable to direct their own destinies. They should toot their own horn loudly, and pick themselves up by their own boot straps. In our ME generation, there is no room for helping others. There is no room for caring about others, no matter what their struggles may be. Everybody is too busy getting themselves ahead.

Jesus said, “My doctrine is not mine – it belongs to the One who sent me.” If the Savior of the world would not claim glory and attention for himself, then we certainly cannot.

We who seek to do God’s will seek to give all glory to God. God gets all the credit. God gets all the admiration. We gear our lives in such ways as to try and say what God would want us to say. In any given situation, we try to mirror the attitude God would want

us to mirror. We try to respond in love. We try to open our hearts and minds, and understand as best as we can. They say there is no I in team, but there is ME. Well, there is no ME in Jesus, or God.

Today is Pentecost, and Pentecost is about doing whatever we can for God. When those disciples sat around an upper room, waiting for God to do something with their lives, they had no idea the changes they would go through. A strong gale force busts through the windows, and fills the room with something similar to a small tornado. Fire hovers close to the ceiling, and then rests on each head. All of a sudden, people who spoke the same language since birth are now speaking other languages that didn't take four years of college for them to learn. The disciples learn right quick that everything they were about to do, from here on out, would be done for the glory of God. Nothing would be the same – their lives would not be their own anymore. Not even their languages would be their own anymore: this is how dramatic the change was. Whether we like how we speak or not, we like our languages. We like having a language, so we can tell others whatever is on our minds. Just think if that was all taken away, and now we speak some other language we've never spoken before, maybe we've never heard before. And now, we

must speak that language for God, not for our benefit. The disciples wouldn't be able to say one word without realizing that their lingo was a gift God gave them directly. Their words would come from God, and draw attention to God. Their doctrine would not be theirs, but God's doctrine.

The Pentecost spirit continues to travel. People are not living for themselves. They are not going after the prize that fills their pockets or makes them look better than others.

I heard a story last week about the disaster relief that still goes on in Japan. We know that Japan was hit by massive earthquakes and tsunamis several months ago, and that one of the nuclear power plants in the Fukushima Prefecture is still emitting deadly toxins. The story I heard last week involves 250 retirees who want to volunteer to tackle the clean-up at the Fukushima plant.⁵ They believe they have lived good lives, and that they should be the ones risking their lives to clean up the mess, not younger people who still have their lives ahead of them. These elderly people are a part of the Skilled Veterans Corp, and they want to be used as tools in the mess, rather than seen as liabilities.

⁵ <http://hypervocal.com/news/2011/the-suicide-corps-elderly-group-wants-to-help-with-japans-nuclear-crisis/> and <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/05/31/japan.nuclear.suicide/>.

The Prime Minister of Japan has an adviser to the nuclear crisis, and he thinks these older people have joined a “suicide corps,” not a skilled corps. Others may think these older people are mad, and should stay where they are. Or, could it be that these people are standing up against the ME culture that we live in? Could it be that they are willing to risk their lives for others not out of insanity but out of love?

Not for their glory but for the sake of others. The Pentecost spirit continues to travel. People are not living for themselves. Jesus came to us not for his own sake or his own glory, but in order to give all glory to the Father. We would be more than happy to do likewise.