

Sermon 20 December 2020

Romans 16:25-27 and Luke 1:26-38

'Unto God **only** be honour and glory'

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You can read that in a few ways. Either we make sure that the things we give to God are only those that honour and glorify him or that honour and glory are only due to God and no - one, no - thing else. It depends on where you put the non-existent comma, or pause or emphasis.

Every so often in my youth I would ponder that conundrum, because it was my school motto. It was embroidered on my blazer and hat badges and engraved on my prefect badge.

I'm not sure I ever came to any conclusion as to which emphasis or interpretation was more correct. They seem to be different faces of the same coin

But it is something that I have subconsciously grappled with over the years.

And it is echoed in the reading from Romans, or perhaps more accurately it is probably based on the ending of Paul's letter to the Romans.

The story of Romans is the telling of the wisdom, love, grace, power and glory of the eternal God revealed in Jesus the Messiah.

And our reading today is Paul's final blessing to those early Christians who received this letter and to all people throughout the ages who have read, heard and seek to serve God.

It's a wonderful almost breathless passage of praise. And it builds into these final words: 'to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever, Amen.'

The wisdom, love, grace, power and glory of the eternal God revealed in Jesus the Messiah.

And Paul is inviting us to join him in piling up all the glory and praise and love and adoration we can muster as we worship God and as we try to always be mindful of Him in the more mundane parts of our everyday lives. So that we might be defined by the glory of God's love. How we might be transformed into the image of God's love.

Mary was transformed by the glory of God's love.

She found favour with God. She was chosen by him.

Last week Kandis spoke about being a witness to the good news.

Luke tells the story, this amazing story of an angel bringing a mission, a ministry to a young girl. A story that has been painted over and over again. We have two examples hanging in church. We looked at two other examples in Art in Advent. Jenny McCarthy and I talked last week about a 12th century painting we saw in St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai in 2009 and how we had marvelled at it.

But how did Luke know about this story? Someone must have told him. There were only two people there – Mary and the angel Gabriel. Mary must have been the first person to tell her story. The first, and only, human witness to the first part of the good news of Jesus Christ.

The witness to the first inkling that the Messiah was not going to be a mighty warrior or a king; but would be born into a humble family. Humble in both senses of the word. A family that was low in the pecking order and yet full of humility, honouring the God who had set them, Mary and Joseph, into the centre of God's plan for the salvation of humankind.

And it seems strange to use those two very different words: 'Humble' and 'Glory' in connection with the Messiah, in connection with God. Yet we can conclude that God's glory is a direct result of the paradox of divine love. God is glorious, not because he is infinitely arrogant; but because he is infinitely humble.

And our response, an obedience of active, loving faith glorifies God, gives God the glory, because it transforms us as individuals and the world through the power of divine love into the image of divine love.

Maybe, maybe that can shift our thoughts and actions to the infinite possibilities of a life lived in tune with God.

For God is not just with us in the times and places of beauty, when life seems wonderful, when we know and experience blessing and good fortune. God is found among the humble, the powerless, the broken and in unexpected places.

God is with us when we descend into life's depths. Rather than lifting us out of them, he comes with us. We may discover God sharing our pain, our fears, our disappointments. We cannot domesticate God, we cannot whistle and expect him to come. We can look for him in the daily humdrum. We can find his light in the warmth, grace and blessing received from others. We can be the giver of warmth, grace and blessing to others.

The words unto God only be honour and glory might have been engraved on my prefect's badge. I am sure they were engraved on Mary's heart.

As this Advent draws to a close, let us remember that we, along with Mary and Luke are witnesses to the good news. May we be transformed by God's divine love and may we, in everything we do, bring honour to God. May the glory of God shine through us. May we experience and witness to the wisdom, love, grace, power and glory of the eternal God revealed in Jesus the Messiah.

8 am ending: And I know that while I'm not authorised to give a formal blessing, we can each informally bless each other. And as we are not taking communion today, I'd like to finish by inviting us to say the Grace together as a way of extending blessing to each other. I'd invite you look at each other as you do it.

Let us say together:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore Amen.