

From Humility to Glory  
John 20:1-18

On Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb while it was still dark. They found the large wheel-shaped stone which had been rolled in front of the tomb rolled back, and the tomb was empty. Mary went to Peter and John to tell them that someone had taken Jesus' body. They didn't believe her. They ran to the tomb to see for themselves that the tomb was indeed empty. Then everyone left. Mary was left alone at the empty tomb with her grief.

Then the Resurrected Christ came to her. She didn't recognize him at first—not until he spoke her name. When she realized that it was Jesus, that he was alive, her grief was instantly transformed into joy. She cried out, “Rabboni” and threw her arms around him. He said, “Mary, let go. Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go tell my brothers that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.”

While Mary was running back to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive, Jesus ascended to his Father, where he was glorified. He gave up all power and authority when he came to us as a baby. At his baptism he was given a portion of power and authority. When he appeared before his Father, he was given all power and authority over heaven and earth.

And he calls us his brothers and sisters, because, on the day of Resurrection we will also be glorified. We will share that power and authority with him—if we have learned the lesson of humility. And the lesson of humility is this: being glorified does not satisfy the hunger of the soul.

What will satisfy us is to look upon the glory of God. The good news of Easter is that one day our eyes will be opened to look upon the full glory of God. When that happens we will be fully alive for the first time.

As Paul says, “Now we see dimly, as in a mirror. Then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Sin clouds our vision of God and God's glory. We catch glimpses, and what we see amazes us.

But what we see now are like the trailers for movies, the little snippets from the movie they use to advertise it. You know only a little about the movie from the trailers, just enough to make you want to know more. And that is our experience with God. We have seen a little of the glory of God here and there, just enough to make us hungry to see more.

And we will. We will spend eternity studying the glory of God, growing in our understanding and our experience of the holiness, righteousness, wisdom, power and love of God.

As the song says, “When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.”

That's good news.

I went to the doctor the other day, and he told me that I was on a high. My blood pressure was high. My cholesterol was high. My blood sugar was high. My weight was up. He said that it was all typical for a man of my age and that medication and exercise would take care of it. Well, when I got home, I hit my home gym with a vengeance. I worked out on my tread mill until I nearly passed out. I crawled into the den, expecting some sympathy from my wife.

She looked at me and said, “Did you think you were going to undo years of poor habits in one night?” I said, “No, I guess I lost my head. I think I’m going through a midlife crisis.” She laughed and said, “Midlife crisis? Do you think you’re going to live to be 120?”

It’s a little late for me to have a midlife crisis. I know that. There are times when I find myself thinking, “You better hurry up and get done whatever you plan to do, because you are running out of time.”

But that’s not really true. If our lives were a book, this lifetime would just be the prologue. That’s the little chapter that comes before chapter one. It’s not even the beginning of the story. It just sets the stage for the story to begin.

Our stories haven’t even begun yet. This life is just setting the stage for the real story. It will start when our eyes are opened to the glory of God.

At Annual Conference, we used to set aside one afternoon to celebrate the pastors who were retiring. They would give a little talk—well not always so little. We now videotape them, so that we can turn them off after an appropriate time. But they would usually give a summary of the highlights of their ministries, give a word of advice to the young ministers and tell us what they plan to do in retirement. I remember one pastor saying that after he retires he was going to enroll in a doctor of ministry program. He said, “I know you are wondering why I would do that now that I am retiring. Well, I’m just retiring. I’m not quitting. I’ve got an eternity of ministry ahead of me, and I’m still learning how to do it.”

Isn’t that good?

Some people think that after we die, we’ll sit around on clouds, gazing into the stars. That’s not what the Bible teaches. Paul tells us we will be providing leadership for the hosts of heaven and judging angels. We will be busy serving God, using the power and authority of God leading creation in the ways of God.

So, that pastor was right. There never comes a time to call it quits.

I don’t know much about golf, but I do know that the swing doesn’t end when the club makes contact with the ball. The follow through is just as important a part of the swing as the beginning.

That’s true in life as well. How we live at the end of our lives is just as important as the beginning. If you are being launched into eternity, you better follow through the whole way.

So, we are spending this life preparing ourselves to receive glory and honor, power and authority with humility.

The way to do that is to keep our hearts and our minds centered on the Resurrected Christ.

Christ has been elevated to the highest places. However the Resurrected Christ has chosen to continue walking with us, as we travel our dusty, difficult, sometimes painful journeys. He has chosen to use his power and authority to strengthen and encourage us.

We should do the same for each other.

I remember a fellow pastor, Joe Wilson, who had been nominated by our conference to be elected bishop. He was traveling around to the different conference delegations to be interviewed, as they decided for whom they would cast their votes for bishop. Joe was serving Marvin United Methodist Church in Tyler. Marvin is a large, impressive church. I had just gone to a little church north of Tyler. One Saturday, the City of Tyler had a spring concert downtown, and I decided to take my family to enjoy a beautiful spring day in the park in downtown Tyler. After the concert I realized my children had never seen Marvin, so we walked the couple of blocks over to see it. As we walked in, we bumped into Joe. He greeted me like a long lost

friend, and he told me he had just gotten back from an interview out of state and was getting ready for Sunday morning. I told him I was showing my children the church. He said, "Let me show your family around the church." I said, "Joe, you must be exhausted from your trip, and you are trying to get ready for tomorrow. I wouldn't dream of asking you to do that." He said, "No, no, I want to do it." And he did. He spent nearly an hour showing my children the church. Joe was elected bishop. The reason he was elected bishop was because he was humble enough to spend give an hour of his time and energy to two small children. A man like that can be and should be entrusted with power and authority.

Christ said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." He was saying that power and authority will be given to those who have learned not to love power and authority. Those who have discovered the joy of humility will be glorified in the day of Resurrection, just as Christ was glorified on Easter Sunday.

Dr. Wesley Welborn  
Senior Pastor