

# Glory Revealed through Grace

Epiphany 2 C Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11

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St. Clement's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia

by The Rev. David Schlafer

*1) Jesus did this, in Cana of Galilee . . . and revealed his glory.*

Wait a minute—just a second—did we miss something?

In this mini-drama we just heard about gallons of water becoming gallons of wine;

I wasn't dazzled by anything particularly GLORIOUS, were you?

Jesus revealed His glory HOW? His disciples believed in Him WHY?

What Jesus does at the wedding feast of Cana seems calculated to AVOID attracting attention, let alone adulation.

Indeed, He almost seems intent on preventing the possibility that anyone would even notice He was there.

Let's replay the story in slow motion:

- Jesus shows up as part of the crowd—just one of many wedding guests.
- His mother sees a wine-shortage problem, and urges: *DO SOMETHING!*

He resists: *NO, Woman; this is NOT the time or place for me to make a scene!*

- She tries another angle, alerting the servants to expect the unexpected—

a guest giving orders that only should be issued by the host.

- Next, Jesus appears to change His mind but still maintain His cover.

He doesn't sweep onto center stage, He operates behind the scenes.

He instructs the servants to undertake some serious heavy lifting.

Moving 120-180 gallons of water? THAT's no quick and easy task!

Not just lugging lots of liquid all the way from the water source to the big stone jars;

but, once it's there, lugging it yet again to the banquet.

- All the while, Jesus doesn't lift a finger.

Doesn't wave his hand over the water jars with a flourish,

uttering in a booming voice: *WATER, BE THOU WINE!*

THAT would have gotten attention!

Think of all the OOOH's and AHH's—the animated, fascinated chatter:

*Who IS that man? Turning all that water into all that wine—*

*Is He GLORIOUS, or WHAT? Let's invite HIM to OUR next banquet!*

- No, none of that—Story Teller John simply notes that,

when the steward had tasted what once was water but (quote) “had become” wine—

the steward remarks to the groom how odd a choice to serve the good stuff last.

- For all his efforts, Jesus acquires no name recognition, gets no credit.

The banquet carries on as if the wine had appeared out of nowhere.

The only ones who know what has just come down, and they don't know just how—

those witnesses are the heavy-lifting servants—and they're not talking.

· SO, to make an end of this slow-motion story replay:

We aren't told HOW the disciples recognize the sign Jesus did;

nor how they come to "believe" in Him—or what that belief might mean.

2) Imagine the consternation Jesus would create for His campaign manager if He were a current candidate for public office!

Can't you just hear the exasperation of media professionals

tasked with generating high visibility, maximum exposure,

and brand loyalty because of the candidate's distinctive selling points.

*Jesus! I hear His campaign team complain,*

*We're trying to market you in the brightest possible light. You're not being helpful.*

*Shake hands, flash smiles, sign autographs, spit sound-bytes*

*Do a show and tell about all the amazing things you've done!*

All this to say, that, when we use the word GLORY,

it's really hard to separate the connotations that surround that word

from meanings we associate with the social construct of CELEBRITY.

Whatever GLORY John's Jesus has, however, CELEBRITY it's NOT.

3) Truth be told, crossed wire connections between GLORY and CELEBRITY do show up now and again in the Biblical tradition.

In Isaiah's prophecy that we heard this morning, for instance;

the “glory” of Zion which “nations and kings” shall “see”  
is compared to the “shining of dawn” and to “a burning torch”—  
a dramatic, attention-seizing GLORY.

But the “Glory” of Jesus, as John’s Gospel depicts it, is far more subtle, much more indirect.

The glory attributed TO Jesus, is a glory that is revealed THROUGH His words and actions.

It’s not “all about” HIM.

4) It’s true that, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, again and again: I AM—  
The True Vine; Living Water; the Way, the Truth, the Life; Bread from Heaven,  
The Good Shepherd, The Light of the World.

But note the common thread in all these self-referring images.

They all have to do with what He makes available through Himself to OTHERS.

When He says He is the Light of the World, He’s not suggesting that listeners should

stare into His floodlight glare, get blinded by His glory, and respond: OH  
WOW!

No, Jesus is the Light of the WORLD---helping us to see that world in a whole new light.

5) *Don’t look AT me; Jesus seems to say, rather, see THROUGH me and then believe—*

This motif is played out not just in His teaching words, but in his healing, helping acts as well.

· Shortly after attending the wedding, He makes another trip to Cana in Galilee.

**A desperate royal official begs Him to come and heal a dying son.**

**It's the perfect opportunity to gain leverage at a vulnerable moment!**

**All Jesus need do is show up and show off His healing power.**

**Instead, He dispatches healing from a distance,**

**squandering the chance for the kind of fame that only comes with face time.**

**The result of this low PR impact healing? The royal official and his household  
"believe."**

**· On a subsequent sabbath, Jesus heals a paralytic, but doesn't identify Himself  
till later.**

**He uses a similar strategy when he heals a man born blind.**

**In both cases, Jesus stands back to give the men space to pursue the soul-  
healing belief**

**that He has initiated through the healing of their bodies.**

**His Glory doesn't overpower them, it enlightens their pathways to belief.**

**· And then there is the feeding of five thousand.**

**As with the story of abundant wedding wine, Gospel writer John takes pains,**

**NOT to zoom his camera in on the act, the "sign," the "miracle" itself.**

**John describes the feeding event like this:**

***Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks,***

***He distributed them to those who were seated, and also the fish, as much as they  
wanted.***

**And when the well-fed crowds try to make Him king "by force," He up and  
disappears.**

**Notice that here, too, like the servants at the wedding feast,**

**it's the disciples who do most of the leg work—**

**first getting those five thousand folks seated,**

**then gathering up all the baskets of left overs.**

**(You can make a case that the “unsung heroes” in each story are:**

**the servants without whom the wine would have been left to go sour;**

**and the disciples, without whom the bread and fish would have been left to rot.)**

**To emphasize the point that the Forth Gospel seems to make in story after Jesus story:**

**Whatever the GLORY is that Jesus reveals, it's NOT the self-attention snatching of a CELEBRITY.**

**6) When he writes to the Christians in Corinth, St. Paul has a formidable task on his hands.**

**He is dealing with a whole community of self-designated Spiritual Super Stars.**

**Each is convinced that their own ways of being Christian are a brighter light than others.**

**The problem is, of course, that they are reveling in their own presumed brilliance,**

**rather than revealing the Light of Christ—**

**and in the process, they are blinding themselves and blinding each other.**

**They are all contestants in a Spiritual Celebrity Competition—**

**and Paul proceeds to rain on their Glittering Comparison Parade.**

***There are varieties of gifts, services, and activities, he says;***

***but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.***

And then, because Paul knows that all of them are saying under their breath:

*But I am special, my gift, my service, my activity is more glorious than any others —*

To counter all that spiritual narcissism, Paul makes his way down the list:

WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, HEALING, MIRACLES,

PROPHECY, DISCERNMENT, TONGUES, INTERPRETATION—

*All are activated by the same spirit, he tells them, and for the common good.*

7) The GLORY of God is what shines forth and illuminates

when nobody is fixated on drawing attention to themselves;

when all are seeking to serve as prisms through whom

the Light of Life pulses, dances, shimmers.

Jesus doesn't draw Celebrity Glory to Himself, so we don't need to either.

The Gospel of John makes this very clear, right at the very beginning.

Of Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, John says:

*We beheld His glory, as of a Father's only son—full of grace and truth.*

How does that glory show itself?

*To all who received Him, who believed in His name,*

*He GAVE POWER to become children of God.*

And to make sure we don't miss it, John says it still another way:

*From HIS fullness WE have ALL RECEIVED grace upon grace.*

8) In a culture where GLORY and CELEBRITY are so closely, tragically, and dangerously comingled,

**you and I are invited into a radically alternative vision by the words and actions of Jesus.**

**We, like Him, like the servants at the wedding, like the disciples at the feeding of five thousand,**

**we can do Gospel leg work from the sidelines.**

**And, as you all do that here, rather than exclaiming:**

***Oh, how glorious is St. Clement's!***

***Oh how spectacular is their new rector!***

**the people of Alexandria will see through all of you a shining example of the Glory of God.**

**And they will come to see, and thus to believe**

**in a Glory that is revealed through Grace upon Grace upon Grace upon Grace.**