

BEST MOMENTS

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 2, 2010

Text: John 13:31-35

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.”

Perhaps you read this news item last week:

A retired jeweler sorting through items donated to a Goodwill store in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, got the surprise of his life when he discovered an expensive 2.6 carat diamond and platinum ring estimated to be worth \$17,600.

*Most of the items donated sent to the center are costume jewelry, but he said the diamond ring **stood out**.*

I'll bet he was surprised: “Fifty cents, fifty cents, one dollar, two dollars, fifty cents, whoa!!!”

If you rummage through your memories, doubtless you will find a few **glorious** moments that **stand out** the way that old diamond ring stood out among all the ordinary costume jewelry. Splendid moments, heroic, astonishing . . .

Let's rummage through the moments of Jesus' life and pick out the best moment. If he were to look back on the days he spent walking among mortals, what would be the pinnacle, the acme?

We will pass over the awkward pregnancy, and the birth in the outbuilding (even though angels were singing in the fields). And that trip to Egypt was a low. Getting lost in Jerusalem and yelled at by your parents? Not so high. That took the shine off teaching the teachers in the temple.

Baptism in the Jordan? Again, an awkward moment with John the baptizer, who didn't want to wash Jesus. Important, but not shining. Low points would include all those arguments with scribes and Pharisees. Oh, and when his mother and brothers came to get him because everyone thought he was losing his mind.

However, there were terrific moments. Turning water into wine and thus saving the day . . . cool! Whenever Jesus healed someone, that had to be a high point, since people were amazed and sometimes they would decide to up and follow him. Particularly when he raised someone that everyone thought was dead.

Maybe the high point was that time on the mountain when his clothes turned blinding white, and Moses and Elijah came to endorse him. Somewhat better than the sermon on the mount, which left a bad taste in some people's mouths. How about when Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish? They almost made him their king over that!

Although the trip to Jerusalem was one fiasco after another, there was a tender evening with his disciples, but betrayal overshadowed it. And the crucifixion? How low can you get? But you have to count the resurrection and subsequent appearances as high points, certainly the very highest. What a treat it would be to come back like Tom Sawyer and find your friends crying, and say "Peace be with you"! Surely his resurrection was the top moment. Perhaps after that the Transfiguration? And in third place multiplying the loaves and fishes?

Well, we don't need to sort through and pick out Jesus' best moment; he identified it in the Gospel for today.

"Now!" he says. "Now the Son of Man has been 'made glorious'; and God has been glorified in him."

What made that such a glorious moment?



Jesus was at that point in the upper room, the night in which he was betrayed. He had done two things that John reports:

He had washed his disciples' feet.

And he had set in motion his own death.

Having done those two things, he said, "Now is the son of Man made glorious."

First, he washed their feet. That was so degrading that Peter at first refused to let him do it. Jesus became *like a servant* to the very guys about whom he was always complaining, saying things like "How long must I be with you," and calling them things like "You micro-believers," (you of little faith). He washed their feet, and told them that they should emulate him.

Then he turned to Judas, the one who was about to betray him, and said "What you are going to do, do quickly." This "second thing" wouldn't *actually* happen until he was raised on the cross, but here he had the opportunity to interpret it to his friends. In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus says that no one has the power to take his life from him, but he lays it down of his own accord. Which, he was to point out later, he would be doing "for them." He wasn't going to die for fun, or in order to become famous, but to love them. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." "And I have called you friends."

In the context of those two actions, Jesus said "now is God glorified in me." First he violated protocol and sacrificed his dignity to care for his friends. Then he gave up his life for them. And he called that his finest hour. "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." Literally, God's splendor has been displayed to you people by what God has done in me as I have done these things.

In Jesus' love for his friends at its most extreme and costly, his glory peaked. The glory of God who commanded, and the heavens and the earth were created, and everything else the psalm says, *reached its apex* in him when he stooped to wash the crud off the feet of his friends, and even of his enemy Judas; and when he gave himself bodily for them.

Sort through the moments of your own life, and pick out the most "glorious" moments, when your splendor shone upon the people around you. Do you think they were those moments of success, when you were admired by all, or at least many? Contests you won, promotions you earned, tremendous tasks you accomplished, people you helped heroically?

Jesus draws us into his way of looking at things, so perhaps the highest moments in your life have passed without notice! When you let go of a serious grudge, rather than taking well-deserved revenge. When you gave a stranger a chance. Perhaps even when you literally washed the feet of someone else. When you did whatever it takes to love one another.

What will be the high points in the week that lies ahead of you? Might they not also be those gem-like moments when you love others as God has loved you? I hope so. I hope that everywhere you go, your love will shine, as you care for others in one way or another. I hope you know that God is not impressed by anything else.

"A new commandment I give unto you," Jesus said. "A new expectation I lay on you," "A new standard for excellence in being human I divulge to you." By *this* is God glorified, when we do *this*.

Yet we are not Jesus. It should be obvious that short of a miracle, none of us is going to attain the ideal of Jesus. He remains the \$17,600 diamond ring, and we all feel, at our best, like costume jewelry. Sure, we'll do things to help others, but we're not exactly going to die for the world, not if we can help it.

However—and this is the Good News—at the same time as God teaches us that to live is to love and serve, he takes the condemnation out of that commandment by forgiving our sin. He does not account us rubbish because of our failure to obey him, but accounts us precious because we are his Son's friends, for whom he died. We are not free from the law of love—that would not be freedom—but we are free from its reproach—the condemnation we deserve for our failure to obey it. Within that freedom, we have the chance to learn and grow into the image of the truest servant, our Lord Jesus.

As Jesus gives himself to us in the sacrament today, we are reminded of the grace by which our sins are forgiven, and we are also reminded that our own greatest glory lies in our participation in that love of God, thanks to Jesus' best moment. Amen.