

Giving God Glory  
John 17:1-11 & 1 Peter 4:12-19  
May 21, 2023

Most of us, at one time or another, have cheered for a team or an individual in a sport.

Whether it was professional baseball, college football, or high school basketball, we can all probably name one team or player that we loved following and cheering for in their sport. A few weeks ago a friend of mine from New York called me and I knew he would want to talk about hockey. In particular, he said, “Your Hurricanes are looking tough. I didn’t think they could beat my Islanders. Fortunately, we have a young team, so I think we will only get better. Do you think you guys can win the Stanley Cup?” I emphasized the words, “your, my, we,” and “you guys” to make the point that my friend and I were taking some of the credit or getting some of the glory for the success of our favorite hockey teams, as though the two of us were out on the ice playing in the game.

In other words, the two of us received glory for something we had nothing to do with, glory for something we certainly did not earn. And yet, the undeserved glory that we received or that any of us receive when our favorite team or player is successful is definitely returned to the team by the fact that we cheer for them; we pay money to go to their games; and we buy merchandise, such as jerseys, T-shirts, hats, and mugs. In fact, every time my favorite team wins a game, I can’t wait to tell people how “we” won, as though I am a part of the team. And I’m sure you feel the same way when your favorite team or player wins a championship or plays well.

Our God has certainly been very successful. He created a wonderful world in which we live and even though we destroyed His perfect creation through our sin, He still supports and provides for His world every day. He even sent His Son into this world of sin to live, suffer, and die, for the forgiveness of our sins and then to rise from the dead to give us the gift of eternal life

with Him. Our God is definitely a winner, a champion, the very best; and through the blessings of our gracious God, we are winners as well, in that we are allowed to share in His glory, in His victory over sin and death, in His success, even though we do not deserve His glory, and have not contributed in any way to His glory.

In our Baptism God glorified us by making us His very own children through water and His Word. We also share in the glory of God when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness here in our worship on a Sunday morning. We share in the glory of God when we read His Word and remember His promises of love and deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We share in the glory of God when we receive Holy Communion – the body and blood of our Jesus, in bread and wine, for the forgiveness of all our sins. God has allowed us through faith to share in His glory, even though we have not earned it; but He loves us so much that He gives it to us anyway. In the chapters leading up to our second lesson for today Peter says, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). So I encourage you to take time every day to enjoy and brag about the undeserved glory of God that He has given to you, in the same way that sports fans celebrate a championship.

Now, that may be easy to do when things are going well for us, but what about those times when things are not going so well? When you’ve lost a job, when you’re hurt, when you feel abandoned, or when we struggle to make it through the day. Where’s the glory and the victory celebration in those moments? Sometimes we may feel like a baseball player I saw one time who came up to bat and he swung really hard at the first two pitches, but he completely missed them. He was so frustrated that before the pitcher could throw his next pitch, he just walked away. He told the umpire he had seen enough. “Just call strike three now,” he said, “I give up.”

But Peter reminds us in our second lesson that suffering is part of being a member of God's family. In verses 12-13 Peter said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Jesus suffered tremendously, even though He never sinned. Therefore, we will have to endure suffering. However, that doesn't mean God causes suffering or that He even wants us to suffer. We suffer because of our sin, but we also suffer because of our faith. Satan hates it that we have a relationship with God and he will do everything he can to destroy that relationship. So Jesus, knowing this, prays for His disciples and all of us in our Gospel lesson, as He prepares to leave His disciples, that God would protect us saying in verse 11: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name so that they may be one as we are one."

I think this is an amazing prayer as Jesus has finished His Last Supper with His disciples and He knows He is about to be arrested and crucified. Knowing that His disciples are going to abandon Him and He is about to endure the most painful form of death imaginable, Jesus prays for you and me – that God would protect us and that we would not fall away from Him. And next week we will see how God answered that prayer by sending His Holy Spirit to keep us connected to Him, and to protect, guide, and strengthen us at all times.

Therefore, as God gives us His glory, meaning as we get to share in the reward of eternal life that Jesus earned, we need to give glory back to God. How? We do this by receiving His Word; by telling others about our Savior, Jesus, and by serving our neighbors. After all, we are what people see of Jesus in our world today. We are a reflection of His glory. It is our responsibility to be the light of the glory of Jesus to our families, our neighbors, and to all people. People see how we treat others, especially those closest to us. People notice how we respond when

someone hurts us. People watch how we, as Christians, respond to a crisis in our lives. In all that we say and do, we need to reflect that glory of our Savior, Jesus, with the same passion that some of us glorify a sports team. One of the best ways to reflect the glory of our Lord is to reflect His forgiveness. We joyfully and thankfully receive the unconditional forgiveness of God in our worship every week, and without hesitation we need to pass that forgiveness on to others.

There's a story of a couple who moved into a new city and immediately joined a local church. But they initially found it difficult to get involved in the life of that church, so they prayed for the people of that church to change – to be more open to others. They said, "Initially when we prayed we were filled with a critical attitude and concern with how the church wasn't coming to us and meeting our needs. But as we continued to pray, the Lord showed us that we were part of the problem and that He wasn't going to change the church until He began to change us." This couple then set up a series of congregation-wide dinners in homes and they then took the initiative to always invite someone who was new to the church to these dinners. In other words, that was their way of sharing the glory of God with others, and there are many ways that we can do the same thing.

Whatever you are going through in your life, remember that Jesus has not abandoned you. He is always with you and He has authorized us to enjoy His glory and to share His glory with others; and that might involve challenges or having to get out of our comfort zones and doing some things differently. But someday, when we leave this world, we will finally see and fully enjoy the glory of God, not as a reward for something we've done, but as a promise – an eternal inheritance for all who believe. If you think it's exciting when your team wins a championship and you get to be part of the celebration with hundreds and thousands of other fans, sharing in the glory of that team's victory, remember that excitement and euphoria is just a glimpse of the

joy and glory of heaven that awaits all of us. So until that day we pray that God would use us to passionately glorify His name in this world in all we do.