

Easter 7 24th May 2020

John 17:1-11

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Today I want to talk about **reputation**. How important is our reputation to us? How important is it what other people think of us? For most people it is at least slightly important. It's particularly important if we run a business. A few weeks ago I heard about a business that sued someone for writing a bad review of the company on Google. The company said that the review had negatively affected the reputation of their business and resulted in lost income. So we ought to be careful about what we write online about other people. Social media is awash with people slandering the reputation of other people.

Today is the last Sunday in the season Easter and the theme which runs through this passage we heard from John Chapter 17 is about reputation – God's reputation. Although the word is typically translated into English as 'glory'. After giving a very long final address to his disciples – it goes for three whole chapters, Jesus prays to the Father:

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, so that the world might glorify you".

Glory is a word that we don't use a lot these days, except perhaps in relation to sport. If a team wins the grand final, we talk about them having achieved glory. And of course we have a soccer team in Perth with the very humble name, 'Perth Glory'. This soccer team, in their better moments, will bring glory to Perth.

So when Jesus prays, 'glorify your Son', there is a sense in which this is all about God's reputation. Which is rather shocking because the '**hour**' that Jesus refers to' is the hour of him being raised up on a cross, and this crucifixion at the hands of the Romans was seen in the ancient world as a terrible act of shaming...of having one's reputation completely destroyed.

John's gospel turns the tide on this whole ghastly story of the cross – of worldly shame – by declaring that THIS is where we see God's glory – God's reputation as one who hangs in loving solidarity with the outcast, the recipients of human violence. This love cannot be destroyed even by death and in this life-death-resurrection, the new age which so many Jews had been looking for, had now arrived. This new life is usually translated 'eternal life', but it's more accurate to say, 'the life of the age'. In Jesus there has been a decisive break in world history. The old age is passing away – the New Age has come. Which is why calendars, at least in a world affected by the Jesus story – are divided between BC (before Christ) and AD (after our Lord).

So what has all this got to do with **OUR** reputation? The church is suffering from a pretty bad reputation at the moment. Should we be worried about our reputation? How much are we concerned for our own **glorification**? Perhaps our concern for the reputation, or glory, of the church has been part of the problem. Maybe we were more concerned for what **we** looked like, than what Jesus looked like IN US.

In the gospel Jesus makes a connection between God being glorified IN HIM, and Jesus being glorified IN US. He says,

"I have been glorified IN THEM" (that is, Jesus is glorified IN his followers who have received Jesus and had faith that he came from the Father and revealed the Father).

It's a pretty big mark of faith of God IN US isn't it? What does it feel like to know that Jesus entrusts his glory, his reputation, to us?

And how does this happen?

Well, it's happening because we have been grafted INTO Jesus and his life, and that this is grafting us into the life of the God the Trinity – this is the third week we've been developing this theme. The Father sends the Son – the Son grafts us into himself, and brings us home into the life of God, his place, and our place, of abiding.

So how is Christ glorified in us? Well part of the answer is that we give **Glory** to Jesus – we give a good **reputation** to Jesus – when we remain connected to his life....so that his life and love and compassion will flow through us by way of the Spirit. Part of the manifestation of Christ's life will be joy and peace – what St Paul called 'the new mind – the MIND of Christ'.

In all this, the focus of our attention shifts from our own reputation in the world, to a more simple question about recognising how God has connected us to God, the source of our life. It is God's work, not ours. This is precisely what happens in the prayer of the heart in meditation. Every time we refocus our attention on the mantra – we are saying, in effect, 'not my reputation, not my **glory**, but yours, O God'. Perhaps we could think of meditation in the practice of letting go of our own reputation.

It is so much easier to be joyful when we are not worried all the time about our reputation in the eyes of other people. We can relax because we know that we rest in God and that God will do whatever God needs to do *through us*, and most likely we probably won't even know when it is happening [Matthew 25:44]. Like the first disciples, we can live joyfully even in the midst of being ridiculed because we share the good company of a crucified criminal.