

The Glory of God A Sermon by Rev. Karen Burger

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Texts: Acts 7: 55-60 John 14: 1-12

The stoning of Stephen might seem a rather depressing lectionary text for Mother's Day but for the fact that he saw a vision of the glory of God! This lifted him ABOVE all the troubles of this world and the cruelty of human beings. So I started thinking about how *we* are seeing the glory of God and how that can lift *us* above the temporary sorrows and troubles of this world. Remember, Jesus said "I have overcome the world." This doesn't mean becoming so otherworldly that we don't care about the people of this world or what happens to them or neglect the matters of justice and mercy and peace. But it means we see beyond the immediate to the eternal. And beyond the immediate pandemic to the whole of life on earth throughout history.

Stephen saw the glory of God in the Father and Jesus in heaven! This image of Jesus at the right hand of God was shocking to his contemporaries and seemed heretical. Imagine how we might feel if I said "I see Ron Burger sitting at the right hand of God." No offense to my husband, but if any of us were seen as having that position in heaven it would seem shocking. So many of those who knew of Jesus as a travelling teacher couldn't quite imagine it. But those who got to see the glory of God in Jesus' ministry on earth and received it, and those at his baptism and at the moment of his transfiguration on the mountaintop, and those who saw in his words a reflection of God's glorious love for all, well, they were among those who have received it...and Stephen's vision has now been passed on to believers today through the Scriptures.

How have you seen the glory of God in Jesus Christ? It is seeing this that helps us to take in, with faith, Stephen's vision of Jesus at God's right hand. The hymn "We Would See Jesus" has a lot of wonderful examples of how we see Jesus at work.

Here are some of the lyrics:

“We would see Jesus, on the mountain teaching, with all the listening people gathered ‘round...we would see Jesus, in his work of healing, at eventide before the sun was set...we would see Jesus, in the early morning, still as of old he calleth “Follow me...”

Today, we see Jesus...in first responders, in the eyes of caring friends we see in masks, in the goodness of those who put others first by wearing that protection when out and about. We see Jesus...in mental health workers, in everyday workers in stores, making needed items available to us.

And yet I hope we can *also* see Jesus in heaven and believe that there is *more* when we leave this earth. As so many make their transition, and some of the Moms and mother figures and aunts and cousins and nieces are in heaven, **hold onto Stephen’s vision**...Heaven is a glorious place! Where all tears are wiped away. Where Jesus is at the right hand of God! When we say “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” in the 23rd Psalm, I believe we are also affirming that we will be with the Lord forever in heaven. “I go to prepare a place for you,” says Jesus in our Gospel text. Recently God gave me a vision of all the souls departing the earth at this time as **migrating birds, moving upward together**...I hope this is a comforting vision to hold on to in what is also a very disturbing time due to deaths we might have prevented had we prepared more swiftly for this crisis. There is still something about the fact that the transition is happening along with other souls that reminds us, once again, that we are never alone.

Meanwhile, we are given works to do with Jesus’ help from heaven. “Greater works than these will you do because I go to the Father.” We do nothing alone, but with Jesus’ help. What an encouragement! The origins of mother’s day is in the women’s peace movement, as women like Julia Ward Howe wanted to save lives after seeing the carnage of war. Read the **Mother’s Day Proclamation** for a powerful witness for life over death! Today in the war against the virus, we can still honor that lifesaving impetus of Mother’s Day...as well as the call for non-violence among nations! And justice, peace, shalom everywhere.

The stoning of Stephen, and the crucifixion of Jesus, are also a reminder that violence and violent death are also a reality in our world. ***As we mourn the death of Ahmoud Arbury recently***, we know that we have our work cut out for us to help create a world where people of color are as safe as white people, where the crucifixion of people of color through vigilante violence is no longer the order of the day, ***where we can see the crucified Christ in all victims of violence***, where the tongue (spoken and written word) and the heart are more powerful and prevalent than the gun. Where racism, sexism, all the “isms” are replaced by deep trust in the brother and sisterhood of all that overflows into acts of service and love. “Greater works than these will you do...” says Jesus. As we work together as the Body of Christ, around the nation and around the world, and truly live in the spirit of Christ, we can do these works Jesus speaks of. Amen!