

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ.

How much does your reputation mean to you? Do you even think about it? When I was younger I seem to remember vague warnings about not getting a bad reputation by hanging out with the wrong sorts of people, or by being indiscrete or inappropriate in personal relationships. But at the same time there was also a sense that you didn't want to give too much weight to what other people thought of you because you needed to be true to yourself. I think the teenage years are a time when the question of your reputation gets special attention. You get put into a group. You're an athlete, or a band kid, or a "popular" kid or a nerd, a drama kid or a "stoner," usually based upon your interests and abilities. And then you get to go away to college where those categories aren't quite as important get a chance to reinvent yourself, to build a new reputation.

Reputations are also important in the world of business. If you get a bad reputation as a business, people won't want to do business with you. Restaurants seem particularly vulnerable here. Bad reviews by food critics, complaints by dissatisfied customers, or a health code violation can ruin your reputation and put you out of business. Or let's take the example of Boeing, the premier aircraft manufacturer in the world. They have earned a reputation over many years of building top-quality airplanes, especially when it comes to safety. But recently, after two catastrophic crashes revealed that they cut corners in testing their systems and keeping pilots up to speed on changes, their stellar reputation has taken a hit. And that has meant cancellation of orders in the short term, and probably a loss of some business to competitors like Airbus in the long term.

I wanted to get us thinking about reputations and what they mean to us as a way of getting us into our readings today and then using them to help us to think about the nature of our mission as the church and our identity as followers of Jesus. I want to focus mainly on our Gospel reading from John, but then also pull in the first reading from Acts as a case in point.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified," Jesus says to his disciples, "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." Did you find those sentences maybe a little bit confusing? Or maybe even complete gobbledygook? What on Earth does Jesus mean by "glorify him in himself"? Glorify is not a word we use very often, and hardly ever in a positive sense. But "glorify" and "glory" are all over the place in John, right from the beginning of the Gospel. Here's one of the best-known verses from John's prologue: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

I think you're not going to be surprised now when I tell you that this has everything to do with God's reputation, the reputation of both God the Father and Jesus the Son of God. Now "glory" is used in different ways throughout the Bible, and it's a little complicated, but I'm pretty convinced that here in John, and especially in today's reading it has to do with showing Jesus to be who he has been claiming to be, namely God's Son, and at the same time showing God to be who God really is, the one who loves the world, the one who brings light out of darkness and life out of death.

A little context might be helpful here. Our reading starts with "When he had gone out..." It's an awkward way to start a reading, because unless you back up into the previous verses you have no idea who "he" is in this first sentence. You probably thought it was Jesus. I did too when I first read it. But it's not. It's Judas. This reading comes right after Jesus has said that Judas will betray him, and right before he will reveal that Peter will deny him. And those are important clues

to what he means by saying that now he is being “glorified.” He knows that now the ball is in motion. His arrest is imminent, and his crucifixion will quickly follow. And this for John is Jesus showing who he really is: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, which John foreshadowed for us also back in chapter 1. You might remember that we had that reading back in Lent. So Jesus is being glorified, shown to be who he truly is, and God the Father is also being glorified in this same act, shown to be who *he* truly is, the one who so loves the world that he gives his only Son for the life of the world. In other words, they are showing their true colors. And it turns out that that is not what the world expected of either of them. The world expects God to rule in power and majesty, and it expects God’s Messiahs to take control, to make the chosen people a great nation again, and to crush their enemies. But they are shown instead to be agents of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This is what it means for them to be glorified.

That makes our reading from Acts today a case in point in the ongoing saga of God’s glorification. It’s a remarkable story. I love it dearly, but don’t have time to go into it in detail now. In a nutshell, it tells of Peter’s transformation from assuming that God cares only about certain people and not others: people like himself, the people of Israel, whom God called into being through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had their laws that were meant to set them apart from others. But through this dream of being ordered to violate those laws, and then through meeting a flesh-and-blood non-Israelite in an occupying enemy soldier whom God had clearly called, his mind is changed. This is the true meaning of repentance. Peter changes his mind and his attitude toward outsiders. But he also changes his mind and attitude toward God. He comes to see that God is not just the God of a particular, select group, but the God of all humankind. And when this happens then God is shown to be who God really is. Or, you could say, God is glorified.

So back to that original question about *your* reputation. Whether or not *you* are concerned about it, it seems that Jesus *is*, that he is concerned about the reputations of all those who follow him and claim his name. If God is a God of love, as we most certainly want to claim, then we glorify God – or we don’t – we show who God truly is – or we don’t – when we reflect that love in how we live out our lives, starting with how we relate to one another in our communities of faith. And that is why Jesus gives this new commandment to love one another.

If only that were an easy command to follow. Unfortunately, it’s the one thing we most certainly *cannot* do in our fallen, sinful state, according to Luther. It was the crux of his disagreement with the church of his day. We simply cannot, he observed, when left in that condition, love God with our whole heart or our neighbors as ourselves. Fortunately, Jesus does not leave us to our own devices. Nor does he simply pile new commandments on top of the old ones we already can’t keep. Jesus does not only glorify God by *showing* him to be loving God. He acts as our loving God to change our reality by releasing us from the stranglehold of sin, death and evil — by forgiving our sin, reconciling us with God, and empowering us with the Holy Spirit to begin to live into the love that we were created for. This is the point, and the effect, of his incarnation, death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit into our lives: to equip us to repent, to realign our attitudes and priorities with those of our loving God. And that’s no easy thing. But Jesus promises to be with us in the struggle. He promises to be with us in the painful task of repenting when our lives defame God and show the world a God who makes distinctions, who values some people and not others, who tolerates injustice, cruelty, and exploitation. And he promises to empower and encourage us to trust in the true God and glorify God by lives that are shaped by love, compassion, and mercy. May we cling to those promises. May they transform our lives and make us fitting witness of God’s glory and the good news that Christ is risen, Alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)