

Sermon :: 18-Jan-2026

Epiphany 2, Year A

“ that [we] ... may *shine* with the *radiance* of Christ's *glory* ”

I am not, as a rule, a fan of traveling by myself: I *enjoy* having someone with whom to ‘process’ what I’m experiencing ... and true confession: I *detest* eating alone in restaurants! But occasionally, it’s for the best that I go solo ... and *nowhere* more so than cathedrals! I can easily spend an entire *day* in just *one*: exploring, reflecting, photographing, praying, attending services, walking the grounds, journaling, sipping tea. Canterbury Cathedral—the ‘seat’ of Anglicanism—took me *three* days!

And so, it came to pass that the summer before I went off to seminary, I spent several weeks, by *myself*, exploring roughly half¹ the Anglican cathedrals in England.² I have many, many memories of this intensive ‘deep dive’ into Church of England architecture, liturgy and history: the hallowed ruins of Lindisfarne ... the starry ceiling of Carlisle’s “quire” ... the site of Thomas Becket’s murder in Canterbury ... the unique pedilavium³ at Litchfield ... the whimsical Swan of St Hugh at Lincoln ... the ethereal late-summer-afternoon glow inside Wells ... the bombed and the rebuilt, mashed together, at Coventry. But of all that I saw ... only *one* work of *art* has stuck with me,⁴ all these years: a statue of Jesus, down in the crypt of the otherwise rather unprepossessing Hereford Cathedral, in the West Midlands, near Wales. (I’ve put an image of it in today’s bulletin.)

For reasons I could not *then* ... and cannot *now* ... tell you, something about this statue just *seized* my spirit and would not let go. I sat in several different places, staring at it, from angle after angle after angle. I’d wander away, going upstairs to the nave or the cloister, to see something *else* ... but would soon find myself going back *down* those stairs, to the crypt, to see Jesus, again! Finally, I just couldn’t resist a total tourist NO-NO: I reached out and *touched* him! And it was only *then* ... when I got close enough to actually place my hand on his arm ... that I saw **the** little placard discreetly posted on the column behind him: “St John the Baptist, circa fifteenth century.”

I literally did a double-take—maybe even a *triple*-take! How could this **not** be *Jesus*?! The Jesus Whom I’d been *praying* to, all day? The Jesus Whom I’d been *reflecting* upon, hour after hour? The Jesus Whom I’d been *adoring* in my thoughts and *writing* about in my journal, while I ate my silent, simple lunch? Yes, how *very* glad—*relieved*!—I was to be traveling *alone*: I’d been spared the embarrassment of babbling on and on about how emotionally *powerful*—how spiritually *arresting*—this statue of ‘Jesus’ was ... only to have to backtrack, *now*, and say, “You know that ‘Jesus’ I couldn’t say enough about? Well, *actually* ...”!

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The signs, of course, were all right there for *anyone* to *see*: the rather macho, unkempt moustache and beard ... the coarse fabric of his tunic, with a big leather belt cinched around his waist ... those

¹ Intentionally excluding London. The other half remains: I’ll get to it, someday! (I did have company the last week of my visit, as I was part of a choir-in-residence at one of the cathedrals. But even then, I usually broke away from my father and his wife and ‘cathedral-ed’ (Winchester, Salisbury, etc) on my own.)

² I also hit a number of ruined monasteries—another passion of mine!

³ *I.e.*, a physical structure built for ritual foot washing, not the Maundy Thursday ceremony.

⁴ Well, if I am completely honest, *two*: At Coventry, there was the overwhelmingly powerful “Head of Jesus, Crowned with Thorns” that had been made from the wreckage of several fatal auto accidents.

jaunty 'lapels'—did they even *have* those, back then?—laid open to expose his bare chest. This was a man who lived rough and hollered at the tender city folk who journeyed out to see him ... way out there in the wilderness!

Had I recognized *any* of these clues, I might have seen the error of my ways ... but I *didn't*. Now, *maybe* that was *ignorance* ... but I have *come* to think that my spirit was responding to the radiance of Christ's glory that *John himself* was shining forth; responding to the inbreaking of heaven—the *holiness* of God—that *John* wrapped his heart around and *beamed* from his *being*. That my soul had somehow registered the glory of God—*mirrored* in the eyes of this statue ... that John had so readily—and also, *first!*—perceived in Jesus ... and then *shared*, with rest of the world.

For I am *now* convinced that I *had*, in fact, been *staring at* ... been *praying* to ... been *communing* with ... *Jesus* ... *all day* ... in the 'person' of John the Baptist: John who not only *recognized* Jesus ... but also pointed others *toward* Him. John who not only named Jesus "*Lamb of God*" ... but also *connected* Him with His *flock*.⁵ John who not only baptized Jesus⁶ ... but also sent Him His first disciples, including Peter, on whom Jesus would build His Church.

For John was the very first among us to *grasp* ... to *partake* of ... to *internalize* ... the *overwhelming power* of the Divine; the *infinite love* of God, [W]ith [U]s; the *radiance* of Christ's *glory*. And *then* ... just as he'd done *for me*, that day I spent alone with him in the basement of Hereford ... John the Baptist consciously and humbly *let* Christ's glory shine *through* him ... out onto, and over, *everyone* he *met*: baptizing *them*, in a manner of speaking, with that *same* Christ-ly glory ... so they—we—too, might come to know Jesus as Messiah ... as Redeemer ... as Savior ... as Friend. John the Baptist *opened* himself—his *whole* self—to the transforming power of God's glory ... and then let its radiance shine forth from him ... to begin *evangelizing* the *world*, in Christ's Name.

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To *grasp* ... to *partake* of ... to *internalize* ... the *radiance* of Christ's *glory*: Does this sound *familiar*? It *should*! For it is what we do ... every Sunday, week after week ... as we come to this Altar for Communion. In the Bread and Wine that, together, we consecrate ... we *encounter* ... we *receive* ... we *bathe* in ... we *commune* with ... the Real Presence of Christ, in *all* His glory (!). We *touch* His glory, with our fingers and our lips. We *consume* His glory, in nourishment of our faith. And we are *filled* with His glory, in union with His grace.

And *then*, what do we do? Well, *that* part is up to *us*. Every Sunday, the Christ Who *came* ... *comes again*—and *feeds* us "with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood" (BCP, p 365).⁷ And having *grasped* ... *partaken of* ... and *internalized* ... Christ's glory ... will *we*, like John the Baptist, let it shine *through* us, so that others may come to know Him, too? Will our *actions* mirror His *love* and *reflect* His *generosity*? Our *attitudes* bespeak His *patience* and our opinions His *mercy*?

⁵ Cf John's father's canticle, in which Zechariah tells his newborn son that he will become a "prophet of the Most High, | for you will go before the Lord, to prepare His way" (BCP, p 92, taken from Lk 1).

⁶ I am taking a small liberty here. John's gospel does not give an 'eyewitness account' of Jesus' Baptism (but only John's own after-the-fact report that the Spirit had descended upon Him); therefore, if we stick strictly to our text for today, we cannot know that John baptized Jesus – but I'm willing to risk it!

⁷ This statement plumbs the depths of one of the best summaries of SACRAMENT that I've ever heard (from a CoE bishop I was traveling with through Israel): SACRAMENTS are "moments of ineffably revealed divine grace" structured so that "we may *readily* and *reliably* access" such grace, again and again.

Our *outlooks* reflect His *hope*? our *dispositions* His *compassion* and *forgiveness*? Will *we* allow the radiance of Christ's glory to *shine* forth from *us* ... just like that statue down in the crypt?

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Yes. how wonderful it would be ... indeed, how ***glorious!*** ... if someone who spent time in *our* presence ... who came back to encounter *us* again and again ... who couldn't resist reaching out to touch *us*, on the arm ... momentarily mistook *us* for Christ ... because the radiance of *His* glory was shining through *us!* For we *behold* Christ's glory, *face to face* (2 Cor 3:18), every week at this Altar. Will *we* let it ***transform*** *us*, as John the *Baptist* let it transform *him*? Then maybe the little placard 'affixed' to *us* will read: "Jesus Christ, twenty-first century ... and forever."

THE REV DOUGLAS S WORTHINGTON
All Souls' Episcopal Church
San Diego, CA

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