

CHRIST'S GLORY HIDDEN BY A CLOUD

By the cloud of the cross; By the cloud of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Acts 1:6-9

TEXT: *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing! (Hymn #171) It's one of those rousing hymns that set the mood for the joy of Jesus' Ascension. Our victorious King has won the victory of Good Friday and Easter, and after 40 of presenting himself to His Church on earth, he dramatically ascended to his heavenly glory to rule his Kingdom until his return on Judgment Day! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The "alleluias" weren't there at this event because, as the Scriptures say, Jesus told his disciples: *...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.* A CLOUD! As Jesus ascends, a cloud hides him and he is gone! Where did he go? The Bible tells us: *He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.* Eph 4 So once again we sing: Alleluia! Jesus Christ, true God and true Man fills the universe, is present everywhere with his almighty power, wisdom and grace.

But that cloud hid him, and to this day we must live by faith for until His return on Judgment Day his glory remains hidden by the cloud of his cross and by the cloud of his Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

There are two theological schools of doctrine that are diametrically opposed to each other in regard to the direction they lead souls. One leads souls to the work of Jesus, the other distracts hearts and minds from the work of Jesus to the work of man with the help of Jesus. One is a blessed focus on the Gospel. The other is a dangerous focus on the success of the Christian's faith.

Martin Luther is attributed to coining the terms, Theology of Glory and Theology of the Cross, to describe these two opposing directions. According to Luther, the cross of Jesus is all that Christ has left us. Nothing we have done, can do or ever will do, can merit God's favor and forgiveness. It's only what God has done FOR us through Jesus' blood and righteousness. Luther's Theology of the Cross is the same as that of the apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthians: *I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified...* 1 Co 2

Jesus' disciples wrestled with a "theology of glory" as our text reveals. Even after Jesus' death and resurrection, on the day of His Ascension, the Bible says: *So when they met together, they asked (Jesus), "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* 1 Co 2 The cross was behind them, and in their minds, the glory of the Church restored on earth was an exciting prospect. The cross was horrible, but it was in the past, and forgiveness of sins was now assured. Jesus had risen from the dead and he was now among them and now nothing could stop the cause! *Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?* Instead, Jesus said: *It is not for you to*

know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority... and then he disappeared! And: *a cloud hid him from their sight.* There they stood, with nothing but the memory of the cross, the empty tomb and a promise that Jesus would come again.

Listen closely to what our Savior says: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority...* How I long for some glory and success at this time! How I long to grow in my faith and serve the Lord! How I want our congregation and our school and our Synod to grow and win souls for Jesus! How I want to pray with power and smile at death with the courage of a great faith! How I want to conquer temptation and to be an example to others! But did you hear what I just said? It was all about ME. It was all about what I want for myself even though these things are noble and good! My prayer could very well be: *Lord, are you at this time going to restore ME?* Instead, Jesus says: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority...*

Instead he tells me what he told all his disciples: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* Lu 9 Not very glorious or glamorous, but it is what will keep us humble and on our knees, pleading the mercy and grace that HIS CROSS won for us. It's not very glorious or glamorous to carry a cross the Lord has laid upon us. It may make no sense that trouble or hardship should come our way. We may never understand why. The Theology of Glory would urge us to see some kind of good in what we must go through, but then we are looking for the glory in our suffering when it remains hidden and known only to the Lord. The Theology of the Cross says that because Jesus died on His cross for your sins, you belong to Him and so whether you understand why or not, just pick up your cross and follow Him, trusting that He loves you and knows what He is doing.

The glory of God is hidden behind the cloud of the cross of Jesus where our forgiveness and salvation were purchased and won. It is still hidden behind the cloud of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

The Bible says: *Jesus said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.* Their glory will be in being witnesses for Jesus throughout the world! They would receive power from the Holy Spirit! How glorious! Little did they know, however, God's plans for them. There would be no strategic planning, but a severe persecution that would cause them to leave Jerusalem and would scatter them throughout the world in accordance with God's plans. Persecution, pain and suffering would be their cross. But the power of God would be the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Jesus' disciples wanted a kind of glory restored to Israel that would make them feel like God's chosen ones. If these men could err, who are we to imagine that we aren't so vulnerable? Know for certain that this temptation will never go away. The dangerous Theology of Glory is what some church bodies teach and we can easily covet their apparent successes. Look at our tiny congregations and schools? What can we do to get them to grow? How do those other churches do it? What can we do to increase growth, both in numbers and in finances? Maybe we need a more dynamic pastor, or more moving worship service! Wouldn't it make sense if we would do some things to elevate

the name of WELS in the world? Give it a higher profile? And suddenly it's all about us, the WELS, St. John's, and what God has hidden behind the cloud of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is hidden behind who we are and what we are doing. And there is no power of God working through our works, no matter how successful they might appear to our eyes.

For the past 2000 years, the witness of these disciples has had its effect. Their witness has come down to us and to each of you through the same Means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The very same charge has been given to each and every one of us who are yet living on this side of the grave: Preach the Word, teach it to your children, baptized and distribute the Lord's Supper to the Church. While preaching, teaching, baptizing and passing out the Lord's Supper may seem foolish to the world and even frustrate our Old Adam that always wants to feel the glory of success, the power, the growth, and the success is up to God. And even though Jesus has ascended to the heavenly realms to fill the whole universe, it is Jesus who declares: *Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.* Mt 18 There can be no greater success story than that!

There is a time when the cloud that hides His glory and ours will be removed. On the Last Day when He returns to raise us and all the dead, the cloud will be removed and we will see Him, and *then the righteous will shine like the sun.* However, then is not now. Now we live as members of this Kingdom by faith in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' cross, and humbly carrying whatever crosses He has given us, humbly preach and teach the Gospel. And when He returns, then we will see the glory. Amen.