Glory is not something we are born with, either. There is no inherent glory in being a king or a queen. There is power, but no glory. Glory is not something we can bequeath to someone else. It is not a gift. It is not free. Glory is *earned*, whether at the Olympics or on the battlefield or at the cross. And it is almost always associated with sacrifice, some form of struggle, suffering, pain, or death*.*

The apostle Paul refers to this: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into *strict training*. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NIV). Paul refers to his own crown when he writes to his protégé Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” He adds, “From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

The apostle Peter echoes this theme: “And when the chief shepherd appears, you will *win the crown of glory*that never fades away” (1 Peter 5:4). A few verses later, he writes: “And after you *have suffered*for a little while, the God of all grace, who has *called you to his eternal glory* in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10). The “crown of glory” is bestowed, but glory is earned by fighting the good fight, finishing the race, keeping the faith, suffering in patience, and training with perseverance.

Glory comes with a price tag, and although we love to get the glory, most of us would rather not pay the price. We would prefer the ecstasy without the agony.  Glory is born in the cradle of suffering, in the *crucible* of suffering, which suggests, in Christ’s case, the cross of suffering and death.

**Glory represents achievement.** The men of the 54th died, but there is glory in their deaths because their sacrifice was not a vain one. They failed to capture Fort Wagner, but they advanced the cause of Black Americans. In the same way, we speak of the glory of the cross. There is nothing beautiful about dying on a cross. It is hard to romanticize a cross. To die on a cross is an agonizing experience. The cross is a brutal instrument of execution. The glory of the cross *is that it achieved so much*. Had Jesus’ death not accomplished something, it would have been just another death. Instead, the fountain of blood flowing from Calvary generated rivers of salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, victory over sin, death, and the devil. This is the glory of Jesus. His death on the cross in the service of others.

The glory of Jesus was his death, not his life. Jesus, the itinerant rabbi, the master teacher, was a nice man. The people liked him. He healed their diseases, showed compassion and empathy, and stood with them against the religious hypocrites and political oppressors. The establishment did not like him, but the people did. But had Jesus lived with the people, and had the years gone by, and had Jesus died the death of an old man, surrounded by his children and grandchildren there would have been *no glory*. A nice man. A wise teacher. An inspiration for us all. A life worthy of emulation. But no glory. Jesus died, executed for the sins of others, and *in that death is the glory of Jesus*. The Bible says his death is the “light of the gospel” (v. 4), the glory of Christ is his sacrifice for us.

**Seeing the glory.** The apostle Paul thinks that we have a problem seeing the glory of Jesus. The death of Jesus, its glory and meaning, seems “hidden” to a lot of people. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, a group of bickering believers who have lost sight of the glory of Christ and lost sight “of the light of the knowledge” of God in Christ Jesus. Paul describes their (and our) inability to see, this blindness, as *a veil*. In fact, chapter 3 of this letter is all about glory and veils. The historical reference is to Moses, who, after leaving the presence of God on Mount Sinai, donned a veil so that the people would not see his face. The prophet’s face was dangerously bright, like he had a divine sunburn, and so Moses drops a veil over his face.

The apostle Paul says that the unbelievers of the present age have a veil over their eyes. Their vision is so cloudy that they are unable to see the glory of Christ. Paul suggests that this veil is placed there by the “god of this world” (v. 4), the worldly passions and desires that draw our gaze away from Christ. Paul believes that people whose eyes are veiled are missing out. They are blind to the light, blind to the good news of the gospel, and blind to the knowledge of the glory of God. Indeed, one wonders to what they are *not* blind.

Do we have veils over our eyes? It is easy to let a veil descend and cloud our vision. It is easy to let the pressures of the world capture out attention. Have we lost sight of the glory of Christ? It can happen without notice, like the slow dimming of the lights until we find ourselves in the dark. Paul urges the Corinthians to remove the veil, to seek the glory of Christ, and to understand the connection between suffering and glory.

**A cause for hope.** When the 54th Massachusetts went down in bloody defeat, the survivors could not have known that from the blood in the sand would soon spring the flower of hope to inspire thousands of Black soldiers to enlist in the cause of liberty for all. They could not foresee how their suffering and pain and the deaths of their brothers in arms could possibly offer hope or change anything.

But our reading is designed to *offer hope*. “We do not lose heart,” Paul writes (v. 1). “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (vv. 8-9). And Paul concludes: “So, we do not lose heart” (he repeats that phrase to drive it home), “For this slight momentary affliction *is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure*” (vv. 16-17).

We have hope. In a world beset by pandemic threats and titanic fears, *we have hope*. In a country torn into screaming political factions, *we have hope*. At a time when racism and other “-isms” divide and humiliate us, *we have hope*. When our “outer nature is wasting away” we have hope that “our inner nature is renewed day by day” (v. 16). When we suffer setbacks and opposition, *“we do not lose heart.”* This is the good news of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4). We do not lose heart. We have hope. All glory be to God.

Prayer: Lord God, we rejoice in your death and resurrection, and in your promise to return. Help us live today as people who await the fulfillment of your kingdom. We confess our tendency to seek comfort outside of you. Bend our knees to the hard work of prayer, worship, repentance, and intercession. Throughout history you chose the seemingly weak to nurture justice, to fight poverty, and to walk bravely toward human thrones of power proclaiming another way. Help us find comfort and hope in our afflictions, knowing you are present with us always. You are our hope and our salvation. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, Amen.

**Sources:**

* Lewis, C.S. *The Weight of Glory*. HarperOne, 2001.
* For information about the films, *Glory, Hope of Glory* and *Paths to Glory*, go to the Internet Movie Database: imdb.com.

**No Guts, No Glory**

Sunday, February 14, 2021 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In 1989, Morgan Freeman, Denzel Washington, and Matthew Broderick starred in a film which won three Academy Awards, including Best Supporting Actor for Washington. It tells the story of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, the second all African-American unit in the U.S. Army. The 54th mustered in 1863, after the Emancipation proclamation, and trained at Camp Meigs outside of Boston under the command of a white officer, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.

When Union military authorities decided to capture Fort Wagner in South Carolina, they sent in the 54th. Fort Wagner sits on Morris Island and defends Charleston harbor; it could only be attacked with a frontal assault along a narrow isthmus. Officials expected casualties to be high, and they were. The 54th lost 40 percent of its men, including Colonel Shaw. The assault failed to capture Fort Wagner. Yet, the heroism, courage and sacrifice of these men inspired the North. President Lincoln commented on their bravery. African-Americans rushed to the recruiting offices: more than 180,000 joined the army and 20,000 joined the navy.

The name of the movie? *Glory.* These soldiers distinguished themselves, earning glory for themselves and their unit. They also created a defining moment in black history, the Civil War, and the history of the United States. Our text today speaks of *glory* twice in the four verses of our reading: “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4) and “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Just what was so glorious about Jesus? What is this glory, and why do we care?

Simply defined, glory is “high renown or honor won by notable achievements.” Think of the Olympics. Athletes train for the Olympics to win glory. Olympic glory. Glory is not something that is bestowed on everyone*.*You cannot go to the podium and expect someone to hand you a gold medal.