

Resisting the Roar

Acts 1:6-14
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11
John 17:1-11
Psalm 68: 4-10, 33-36

Evolutionary psychologists have coined the term homophily. You may be more familiar with the more modern-day term for a similar thing, the “people Like Me syndrome”. It means that humans tend to affiliate with, purchase from, vote for, befriend, and marry people we believe to be like us. When we know someone has something in common with us, it makes us feel safe. Evolutionarily speaking, it serves the purpose of building networks of mutual care and support. It is a good thing. However, when this instinct is fueled by anxiety, it inevitably leads to the impulse to exclude. And we all know the dangers of tribalism. When we see other people as a threat, we cling tighter to our tribe. The unfortunate consequence of being shaped by anxiety is it causes us to see strangers as enemies. But the impulse of God, the impulse of a life fueled by the divine life, is to reach towards strangers and invite them into friendship. When Christ is central, the things that make us different from one another are not impediments to unity because the image of God is what binds us together.

Today's passages all highlight the glory of God. Glory is one of those churchy words that feels fuzzy. The glory of God refers to God's weightiness, radiance, the things that distinguish God from humans... God's otherness. The term is difficult to understand, by definition, because it's a word we use to describe intangible things. God's glory is utterly beyond us. - Jesus looked up to heaven to pray, later the disciples' gaze followed Jesus into that same place beyond human sight, and into glory...into otherness. - Peter himself was a witness to the resurrected Christ. When he talks of Christ's glory, he is coming from a place that rejoiced to see it revealed in the risen Christ and joined with God through the ascension. Peter says that same glory, through the presence of the Spirit of God, now

exists within us. According to Peter, it is the power of that presence, that glory, which transports us beyond normal human responses. That glory allows us freedom from our anxieties. If we keep ourselves alert to it, God's glory will transform our anxieties into confidence in the God whose glory is powerful enough to protect us from every adversary.

Our texts do not minimize the reality of suffering. Our Psalm specifically mentions orphans, widows, prisoners. It talks about marching through the wilderness. In scripture, the wilderness is never a safe place to be. And Peter is talking to a group of people who are suffering a “fiery ordeal”. Peter's people were suffering social alienation, economic vulnerability and political instability. Peter recognized that being out of step with the world is painful, threatening, and he warned them of the danger of anxiety stealing their identity and their source of power. He recognized the power of anxiety to cause us to fear and reject others and so he reminded his people of their identity within the life of God's glory. It is the knowledge of our identity that helps restore, support, strengthen and establish us as we walk near enemies eager to devour us. But Peter also cautions them to recognize who the enemy truly is. It is the adversary, the devil, not those made in the image of God, and certainly not those who share the glory of God.

Immediately after Jesus ascended beyond the veil, out of sight, the disciples went together to an upstairs room in Jerusalem to pray and wait. We just listened to (Betty/Jim) read a long list of the names of those present in that room. That list is not included simply to test the skills of our lectors. It is making a very specific point. That room was filled with a nationalist zealot who hated Rome, a tax collector who served Rome, a man who denied knowing Jesus, a skeptic who'd refused to believe Jesus rose from the dead, working class laborers, wealthy businessowners, Jesus' own brothers who did not originally believe him, and women who weren't viewed as equals. This church Jesus is establishing is not powerful or uniform. It is diverse and imperfect. The church is not about natural compatibility, and it certainly was never meant to be filled with “people like me”. God's

glory would fill Jesus' people and make us all people like Christ, filled with the Spirit, accomplishing the unifying, reconciling, healing work of God.

In March 2026 the Pew Research Center published a report that said, "In a 25-Country Survey, Americans are Especially Likely To View Fellow Citizens As Morally Bad". This survey revealed that 53% of American adults believe the morality of their fellow citizens is "bad," making the U.S. the only country among 25 nations surveyed where a majority held this view. Friends, I don't need to tell you that we live in very divided times. Data from a 2025 survey says that 66% of Americans identify as Christian. What these statistics are telling us is that most of us identify ourselves with the life of Christ and believe other people are doing it wrong. And not just wrong, but that our neighbors are morally bad. The 2026 study goes on to explain what we believe is so morally wrong with our brothers and sisters. We are judging one another for having affairs, using marijuana, viewing pornography, gambling, having abortions, homosexuality, alcohol use, and getting divorced. And if the list from the study doesn't hit home, just this week I've heard several folks assuming evil of others based purely on poor driving skills. Let's face it, we're judgmental people.

Now, I am not here to tell you that engaging in any of these behaviors is morally good or bad. But these texts do not warn us to worry about morally questionable behavior. And they certainly do not tell us to worry about it in others. The problem with believing others are morally bad is that it causes us to distance from them. It doesn't matter if our contempt is directed towards people represented on that list or if it's towards those who think that those behaviors are wrong. When we disdain and scorn others, we tend to adopt self-defensive postures against them. We feel justified in acting with hostility and coldness. Our own moral conviction and superiority can lead us to social exclusion, and history proves it can go so far as supporting and justifying harmful action against those

who are not “people like me”. But our Psalm teaches that it is God’s glory that protects us, going ahead of us “through the wilderness”, alleviating our anxieties.

Jesus’ prayer in John seventeen was offered in the garden on the same night he was to be murdered. Of all people, he could have given in to fear. He knew what was coming. Jesus knew, with absolute clarity, the moral evil that existed within those who would soon betray, torture, and murder Jesus. Yet Jesus did not give in to fear. Instead, in that vulnerable place, he prayed that his followers “may be one, as we are one”, filled with his glory, and that knowledge would protect their unity. He knew his followers would be faced with their own terrors. But Jesus did not illustrate or instruct those who carried his glory to fear or disdain those who behaved differently. This is why being a follower of Jesus is challenging. Jesus-followers are meant to see the divine image in every face and call to it even when that same face threatens our safety.

Our enemy, the devil, is working hard to destroy the beauty of God’s people on this earth. But the people of God are not marked by anxiety and disdain for other people because we are too busy looking for the divine image God stamped on every human heart. Jesus said, “I have been glorified in them”. We look like Jesus. We are now strengthened by the glory of God that exists within us, through the Spirit.

It is not always easy to see God’s glory in other humans. Our experiences have been different, we have been shaped by different things, and it is easy to assume differences are bad and allow anxiety to distance us from one another. But that is not how God sees us. God’s glory is given freely. Jesus’ resurrection made it possible for us all to join in the divine life. When God looks at us, the glory of Christ is reflected back. When the divine eye gazes on us, God sees “people like me”. Our response to the divine gift is to let it flow through us, to join God’s work, to overflow with the otherness of God that invites all people

to experience God's glory through us and with us. When we take the body of Christ into ourselves at the eucharist, we receive that gift afresh and we make it manifest.

May we be a people so aware of the glory of God that we see it, experience it, and then let it flow through us, transforming the weakness of anxiety into the strength of unity.