Malcolm Clemens Young Exodus 34:29-35

Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, 2C26 Psalm 99:5-9

Transfiguration (Year C) Baptisms 11:00 a.m. Eucharist 2 Peter 1:13-21

Sunday 7 August 2022 Luke 9:28-36

**A Shard of Blue Glass**

“[B]e attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1).

When we were first becoming friends I did not talk much about my old life. Before joining you I served at Christ Church, Los Altos for fourteen years. From inside, that church building looks like a jewel box. It has four massive walls of stained glass. Each 12 x 34 ft. window depicts a different season of the year. The stained glass alone weighs 19,000 pounds. As the first person to arrive there every summer morning I remember the silence and the overwhelming feeling of God’s presence in the light.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Gabriel Loire (1904-1996), the artist who created those windows also made the Grace Cathedral Human Endeavor windows which honor Thurgood Marshall, Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, John Glenn and others. We have other Loire windows in the transept clerestory and the north quire aisle.

But what I really want you to notice today is the rose window that Gabriel Loire also made. It is dedicated to the patron saint of our city, St. Francis, and to the poem attributed to him called the “Canticle of the Sun” (1224-5), the oldest known poem in colloquial Italian.

This is the largest rose window in the far western United States. It is 25 feet in diameter and has 3,800 pieces of glass. Every morning, light from the sunrise filters through it. Every night we illuminate it from inside so that the city can see its beauty and be reminded of God.

In summary, I have spent pretty much every day for twenty-one years experiencing the beauty and love of God through Gabriel Loire windows. Then a month ago for the first time we visited the workshops where all of them were fashioned.

We set out from Chartres Cathedral on one of the most beautiful walks of my life past clay tennis courts and ancient sycamore trees, past a viaduct along a river which wound through green meadows. Without an appointment we walked up the driveway to the Loire studios and a man in white coat like a lab technician asked to help. It turned out to be Bruno Loire, Gabriel Loire’s grandson. He asked us to wait in the gardens and then totally rearranged his schedule so that he could show us everything.

We visited four different studios where they make the glass. We saw a secret project for fashion week. Bruno drove us to a nearby church to see the glass there. We had afternoon tea with Gabriel Loire’s widow. Bruno showed us how he makes the kind of stained glass in our windows. With a mallet he shattered a piece of blue glass and handed it to me as a gift. Still sharp, it cut my thumb. I kept trying to hide the fact that I was bleeding.

And here it is. I want you to imagine that this piece of glass is your truest self, your soul if you will. It is beautiful. It is utterly unique. Perhaps you find it easy to see this holiness and distinctiveness in children. As we get older people have a harder time seeing this beauty in us but it is still there. Whoever you are as you listen to my voice, I want you to know this: that like this piece of glass, you are beautiful.

The musician James Taylor speaks about his first twenty-one years in an autobiographical audiobook (called Break Shot). For a while at the end of his teenage years he was a psychiatric patient at Maclean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts at the same time my grandfather was a chaplain there. I sometimes wonder if they met.

James Taylor talks about being a jealous agnostic. He wants to believe, in part because he sees that if we live only for ourselves, if we only serve our own ego, this selfishness can be a dangerous trap. He sees the power of being in community of caring for other people and the world.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Today we celebrate baptisms together, the sacrament by which God adopts us as children. It is the way that we become members of the church. It is how we become one with Christ, experience forgiveness of our sins and have new life in the Holy Spirit.

If each of us is like this beautiful fragment of glass. Baptism is the reminder that we are even more beautiful together. Baptism is like having your beautiful fragment of glass included in a vastly larger window. That window is the church and it tells the story of what God did in the past and shows us what God is doing now. In the dark night of the world this light can give other people heart.

This brings me to a difficult topic. We along with 85 million other people are part of the global Anglican communion, the third largest Christian body in the world. This week the bishops of all these churches met together in England. On Friday a group calling itself the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans published a statement. In it they declare that a gathering of churches which cannot agree about same sex marriages cannot be in communion with each other.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Although these bishops have no authority over us here in North America, these are very alarming words, especially as we worry about the forces that seem to be undermining our nation’s commitment to marriage equality.

At Grace Cathedral we believe that every person without exception is deeply loved by God. This is true of LGBTQ+ people. It is true of same sex couples. We will not stop marrying these couples who come here seeking God’s blessing. We see the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

Let me close with that poem of praise from the thirteenth century that I mentioned earlier as the inspiration for our window, Francis’ “Canticle of the Sun.”

“Praised be my Lord God, with all creatures, and specially our brother the sun, who brings us the day and who brings us the light; fair is he, and he shines with a very great splendor. O Lord, he signifies to us thee! // Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars… which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.”  
  
“Praised be my Lord, for our brother the wind, and for air and clouds, calms and all weather, by which thou upholdest life in all creatures. // Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable to us, and humble and precious and clean.”  
  
“Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest light in the darkness; and he is bright and pleasant, and very mighty and strong. // Praise be my lord for our mother the earth, … which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringest forth divers fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass… Praise be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for love’s sake… blessed are they who peacefully shall endure, for thou, O Most High, wilt give them a crown.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

The face of Moses shone after he had been talking to God. When Jesus spoke to God on the mountain, Luke says that, “the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Lk. 9). You too are God’s beloved child. You too shine with the glory of God’s majesty.

There are 3,800 pieces of glass in our rose window that is about the same as the number of people who worship here at Christmas. We are beautiful together. And the light of God shines through us.

Images:

Bruno Loire and Malcolm Young

Loire Studios workshop (multiple)

Grace Cathedral Rose Window

1. You can learn more about the Christ Church, Los Altos dalle de verre stained glass windows at: <https://www.ccla.us/stained-glass-windows> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. James Taylor, *Break Shot: My First 21 Years*, 2020. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.thegsfa.org/_files/ugd/6e992c_2f554b72149d495bb17635b79bb3fc22.pdf> and <https://www.thegsfa.org/_files/ugd/6e992c_8951f0f7ce4b4e7083f877b4b38294a2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This translation piously includes the note that another stanza in praise of death was added to the poem on the day St. Francis died, 4 October 1225.

   “Praised be my Lord for our sister the death of the body, from whom no man escapeth. Woe to him who dieth in mortal sin. Blessed are those who die in thy most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm. Praise ye and bless the Lord, and give thanks to him and serve him with great humility.” Translated by Maurice Francis Egan. <https://www.bartleby.com/library/prose/2051.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)