

What is Glory?, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 20091018
Hebrews 5:1-10 and Mark 10:35-45
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Here is a photo of your pastor in a freefall three weeks ago after having jumped out of a perfectly good airplane! I'm soaring through the air. You may ask why I jumped out of a perfectly good airplane. This is not an activity that was on my "bucket list."

A bucket list is a list of things a person wants to accomplish before "kicking the bucket." It is a term popularized by the 2007 movie of the same name starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. I have not yet formed a bucket list, and even if I had, sky diving would probably not have made the list! But, here I am in the middle of a freefall.

When I stepped out of the airplane at three miles up, there was nothing between me and the ground. I looked down and thought, "O Glory." And it was glorious. There was a powerful rush of wind as I plummeted at one hundred twenty miles an hour. We could see downtown Detroit thirty miles away.

In this, my last sermon, I want to talk about trust. This photo shows some elements of trust. First, this is Mike, the man who had the parachute strapped to his back. I had to trust Mike as an instructor. He is the one who pointed out the Detroit skyline and other points of interest. Actually, my only interest was in being able to live and walk after we hit the ground.

Second, I had to trust in the harness that tightly strapped me to Mike. If that harness gave way, I wouldn't be here today. My job was to pull this orange ball when Mike told me to. I had to trust that that little ball would open the parachute. When the parachute did open, I was surprised that there wasn't a sudden jerk. It was smooth, calm, and peaceful. Mike guided us to a perfect stand up landing just a few feet from the hanger.

Trust. This photo was snapped by Marijana, our Croatian daughter. Marijana asked me the day before if I would go sky diving with her. It was because she was so excited and eager to give me this jump as a retirement gift that I said, "Yes!" I haven't told you much about Marijana during the time I've been with you. Marijana came to live with us in 1993 during the height of the Serbian-Croatian war. Her home had been destroyed by Serbian forces. When we first met her, she had one goal in life. It was to join the air force so she could kill Serbs.

Marijana grew in trust. In college, she sought out and sat down and discussed with some Serbian students and discovered their mutual human dreams and their quest for peace. She joined the International Club and designed an international cultural fair where students could share and understand each other's cultures. Today, Marijana is an engineer with the Chrysler Corporation. When she came here, she did not even know what the word engineer meant! Marijana had to trust us enough to leave her homeland and family and come to a strange new culture where she would have to learn English. I jumped from the airplane because I trusted in Marijana.

As I leave the ministry of Elon Community Church to soar into retirement, I ask one thing of you. Trust. Trust in God, trust in each other, and trust in the future. If you trust each other, this church will continue to soar.

James and John did not engender trust among the disciples because they did not understand glory. For the third time, Jesus announced to his disciples that he was going to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, be condemned to death, be mocked, flogged, and killed, and after three days, he would rise. Here was the response to that news from James and John, the brothers

Zebedee: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”¹ They wanted to experience the honor, praise, and renown they thought would come in glory. The other disciples heard this request and became angry with James and John. They wanted a piece of the glory stuff also.

If you are in this Christianity business because you want a taste of that kind of glory, you might as well get out now. That kind of glory is not what Jesus was about. If you are in this Christianity business because you want to be saved, I suggest you get out now. You will be disappointed. Seeking glory, power, and personal salvation only engenders mistrust and tears groups like churches apart.

We hear a lot about Jesus’ dying for our sins. People take great comfort in that belief, but comfort is not the message of the gospel. The gospel is actually quite discomfoting. Discipleship will mean more trouble, not less. True discipleship is the costly pouring out of one’s life for others.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, and it was here on earth. The kingdom of God is the rule of justice and love. It is what we pray for each Sunday in the Lord’s prayer, that God’s kingdom would come here on earth. God’s kingdom is where all people are loved and valued as children of God. No one has greater or less importance than anyone else. Such a kingdom goes against most of our human ways of competition, individualism, and self-service.

Jesus’ response to James and John was, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”² Elon Community Church, you do not have tyrants, people who lord it over one another. You are priests to each other. You do calling and visitation with the sick and the shut-in.

In order to be priests to each other, you need to know each other well, not just the superficial “Hi, how are you,” on Sunday mornings. It is important to develop more small groups like Conversations of the Heart, Living the Questions, and Companions in Christ where you hear one another’s hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows. It is to be able to care about and for each other and about needs of the world around you. Glory is to be a slave, a servant of all.

So, I leave Elon Community Church as the Senior Minister and jump into the free fall of retirement. I leave knowing how strong this congregation is. Continue to be strong by trusting: trusting God; trusting each other; trusting the future; and trusting the future professional leadership of this church.

Continue to be strong not by seeking glory, but by serving: serving God; serving each other; and serving the community around you in the name of Jesus Christ. Continue to be strong by loving: loving God; loving your neighbors; and loving yourselves.

As Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”³

¹Mark 10:37

²Mark 10:42-44

³John 13:34-35