

“NO MORE ICHABOD!”

A Sermon for Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2016

Text: Romans 5:1-5

No more Ichabod! Let there be no more “Ichabod”!

If you have ever heard the name “Ichabod,” it is probably not because you are familiar with the story of how a child was given the name when his mother heard that the Ark of the Covenant had been stolen from Israel in a battle in which her husband was killed. It is more likely because you have read the story of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Ichabod Crane is the main character in that story. He is a most unfortunate and not very nice man who is pursued on horseback by a “headless horseman,” after which he disappears forever.

There is a link, of course. Authors of fiction often signal something about their character by the name they choose. “Ichabod” means “no glory.” The biblical mother gave her baby the name Ichabod “because the glory has departed from Israel.”

I checked, and “Ichabod” is not in the top 1000 boys’ names for any year since 2000. I was unable to find anyone on Facebook with the name “Ichabod.” There are only 32 people in the U.S. with the name “Ichabod.” New Mexico, with one Ichabod out of 3 million people, has the highest concentration of people with this name.

“Ichabod” is not a good name. I wouldn’t give it to a real person, or even to a fictional character, if I were you. Stay away from that name.

“The glory has departed.” What a sad comment.

We all have glory, of one sort or another. Our glory is what we are “best known for.” Our glory is what we put forward, when we put our best foot forward.

When we want people to like us, we let our glory show.

What is your glory? Of what are you most proud? What is the “great thing” about you? Is it your appearance? Your good nature? Your wit? Your musical ability? Some athletic gift? Something excellent you have made? Your family? Your advanced years? Your reputation for moderation? Your strong opinions or great wisdom or integrity?

Your “glory” is whatever you are most proud of. It could even be something negative, although we would then call it notoriety; but sometimes people turn this upside down. Whatever you want to be known for or known as, let’s call that your glory.

So, what would it mean for your glory to depart?

That would be sad. It would be like it was for Israel when the Ark of the Covenant, representing God’s glorious presence in the midst of them, was stolen and taken to a foreign land. Truly they could say “Ichabod.” “The glory has departed.”

Fast forward to Trinity Sunday 2016. What is the glory of God, to us? What are we talking about today, when we refer to the glory of God? Of what is God most proud? What do we say God wants to be known for?

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, leading Israel through the Sinai? That was back then. What about now? What should we point to, when we say “There is the glory.” We do not have an ark of the covenant. Is it because the glory of God is not present to us?

What do we as Christians point to about God, and say with joy and pride “That’s our God!” or “That’s what our God is really like!”? Or “Now, there’s our God!” What do we point to as the best reason to worship and adore our God? What is the glory of God to us?

The doctrine of the Trinity gives depth and breadth to the Christian notion of God by pointing to the glory of God.

1) We do not deny but affirm that God’s glory is apparent in Creation. Staggering variety, beauty beyond awesome, symmetries balanced with asymmetries, complexity beyond our ever knowing, how could we not call this the glory of God. We do not deny that the glory of God the Father almighty is seen in creation, both heaven and earth. We affirm it. But we also know ourselves to be the worst part of creation. We recognize that we are of all species the one most unfit to continue in creation. So we don’t settle for one article of faith in God. Rather, we go on to confess a second part:

2) We confess ourselves to be amazed at the revelation in Jesus Christ that the Creator God has promised never to give up on us or abandon us. We point to that promise specifically in Jesus Christ. We point to what Jesus himself professed to be his hour of glory, when he was privileged to give himself on the cross for the well-being and the unity of all of us, the “loser” species. That is the second sort of “glory” we see in God. But, our appreciation of the glory of God does not stop with seeing the glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We go on to rejoice in a third “glory” of God, and that is God working within us

3) So, thirdly, we confess it to be amazing that God works inside people to call us back to our own created glory, the glory he bestowed on us in creation, when he made us in his image. We say in our Creed that we admire this about God, that God did not hit the pause button after raising his Son from the dead, but instead continued to do amazing and profound things in the human part of creation

by instilling his own Spirit in us, particularly by giving us the gifts of the Spirit so that all of us could appropriate the life that God wants us to have—so that God would be glorified in and through us! That is to say, we share in the glory of God. Because there is a second article and a third article in our creed.

Thus, when we point to the glory of God we point not only to the beauty of nature, but also to the beauty of God’s grace given to us in his only Son. And to the glory of God working in you and me.

Paul says in Romans 5:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

True, we have “fallen short of the glory of God,” which is to say that we were a bunch of Ichabods. The glory had departed from us. But now, in Christ, our Maker has recreated his image and glory in us through the forgiveness of that which drove out his glory. To our shame, we had acted as though other things were our glory—our wisdom, our strength, for example (see 1 Corinthians 1). Now, however, we “boast in God—through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

There is good news in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not a useless item of dogma meant to reconcile complicated and conflicting Bible passages. It is how we express with praise and thanksgiving that the glory of God is neither remote from us nor separate from us but actually lives in us and gives us peace. Because God is Trinity, we who love God are shaped by God not merely to be inventive or creative, but to be people of love and mercy. This is what it means to share the glory of God—that we forgive as we have been forgiven, we serve as we have been served, we love as we have been loved by God.

Paul expresses this truth of the Trinity in these words: “For it is the God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

No more Ichabod! No more Ichabods! “For the glory of the Lord has appeared, for the salvation of the world.” Amen.

