

Divine Life

[Acts 7:55-60](#)

[1 Peter 2:2-10](#)

[John 14:1-14](#)

[Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16](#)

Saturday was the feast day of Saint Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria during the mid 300s. One of my favorite quotes comes from him. He said, “the Son of God became human so that humankind might become God”. In other words, “Jesus became what we are that he might make us what he is.” This concept is known as theosis. Theosis is an invitation into the triune life, dwelling in God as God dwells in us, and living from that center. So, buckle up, we are going to talk some real theology today. But before we do that, we're going to talk about border collies

Last weekend there was a sheep dog trial at Hoover Ridge park. I got to watch a shepherd working her dog with a group of sheep. Have you ever seen this done? It's amazing! With very few cues from the shepherd, these dogs run wide around the sheep, careful not to scatter them. They bring the sheep under control and then drive them wherever the shepherd wants... in this case, into an enclosure. The dogs are bred to have this instinct inside of them. But they also have to be trained to work with their handlers because the dogs can't know the shepherd's exact goal in every situation. They must be constantly aware of their handlers and sensitive to the most subtle of commands. These dogs are completely free, but also entirely willing to follow the guidance of their shepherd. And they love it! They put themselves in harm's way, risking themselves against confused and uncooperative sheep. They run at full speed sometimes and at others, they crouch and wait completely still with unimaginable patience. To me, watching them was a perfect picture of life with God... Especially since last week was Good Shepherd Sunday and today, we are discussing what it means to participate with the shepherd. So, this morning,

with border collies in mind, we are going to consider how to stop being mere spectators and become the dwelling place of God.

In our reading from Acts we encounter Stephen illustrating the life of Christ as he faces his own murder. Both Jesus and then Stephen, at the precipice of death, quote from Psalm 31, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." In this story, we see the whole Trinity at work in one moment. Stephen is full of the holy spirit. He sees the glorified presence of God, and he entrusts himself to Jesus. At the moment of his death, Stephen invites the presence of the Holy Spirit to fill him, and in so doing, he participates fully in the divine life. Now, you might be thinking... but he was dying! True. Jesus was also dying when he quoted this Psalm. Jesus redefines deliverance. The refuge he took in God at the moment of his death was a proclamation that physical death is not the end of life. God exists beyond death and our security is in Christ regardless of physical life. Jesus' resurrection was a pattern that we follow, but it first and always begins with death. We die to our own will so that we can live to God's. Death to self opens us up to life with God. The Psalmist prays, "make your face shine upon your servant." The glory of God lit the face of Stephen, and when we allow ourselves to be led into the divine life, our faces glow too. We may not experience deliverance in the time or the way that we desire, none of us ultimately will escape physical death, but we can experience resurrection life, and that life will transform our appearance so powerfully that it transforms others.

Now the problem with some theology is it tends to make spiritual things sound ethereal, translucent, with silver edges, And very far away. Maybe that's how participation with the Trinity has always felt to you? If so, you are in outstanding company with the disciples. They had Jesus, the perfect physical image of God in front of them, and they still did not understand. They too expected the Messiah to be something otherworldly. And like the disciples, we expect and often want to be pulled out of this world because we imagine distance from pain, grief and loss, are found in that cloudy otherworldly place. But God was made human to draw close to humankind. God used dirt to create us. Jesus was

made of dirt; he used mud to heal and is certainly not afraid of the grime on his own skin or ours. If we want to be like Jesus, to participate in God's life like Jesus, we must also be willing to settle into the dirt. Human life can be messy and painful, but that is where the divine life is active, in the grubbiness alongside the humans God loves. The dust and ash of grief stand next to the grave, but they are also the place in which resurrection life begins. The border collie might want to run but watching his handler sometimes means patiently waiting for what he doesn't understand. If we want to experience life, we must first let go of our version of it. If we truly want to live, we must begin by asking ourselves what we are clinging to about the life we control. We clutch at our health, our homes, our communities, and our sense that we still matter as our world and even our bodies change beyond recognition. But if we really want to live, to participate in God's life, we must start at the cross.

Our passage from John begins with Jesus comforting his disciples after foretelling his coming death. When Jesus says that "in his father's house there are many dwelling places", we are looking for comfort and like to read it as if "the father's house" refers to otherworldly architecture we can use as an escape from this world. It does not. "The father's house" refers to the relational sphere of God's presence. Jesus goes behind the veil so the Spirit can come fill us, so we can be connected with the divine life, dwelling with God. Stephen showed us where the divine presence dwells. It dwells here. Sure, it exists behind this veil that we cannot see beyond most of the time. We cannot see it, but it is with us when we cry out for help and it is in us, shining from our faces. This reading from John is showing us a pattern to follow to participate in the divine life, a pattern of relationship with God, of trust through death, resurrection, and glorification that we experience with and in God. When Jesus says he is going to prepare a place for us, he is on his way to be crucified, the place he is going is death. To participate with God, we start by laying down our lives. Then we can follow Jesus into resurrection. It is through this pattern that we dwell with Christ in God.

As participants in the divine life, Jesus tells us that we will act in his name. As little Christs, we ask God to perform Jesus' works through us. Anything that is accomplished in the name of Jesus is the will of the Father. We cannot control it, but through the Holy Spirit we can be conduits of it. In Christ we have God's authority, presence, and representative power. When we are aligned with Christ, dwelling, at home in that relationship, the power of God flows through us, regardless of how weak we may feel. We do not act from our own power, and we need not feel powerful to exist within the omnipotent power of God. Our weakness makes it possible to experience divine strength. It is God who holds the power to overcome human weakness and empower resurrection.

Through the Spirit we are invited into deep participation and union with God. Which means we are no longer passive observers of Jesus' life. We can be active participants in it. According to Peter, we are now living stones, and we must allow ourselves to be "built into a spiritual house". We are the house where God dwells. When we follow the good shepherd, like trained border collies, we surrender our will, dying to our own desires. We dwell with God and provide a dwelling place for others to experience the divine life, becoming united with divine purposes.

Jesus became human so that we can participate in the triune life of God. God desires to dwell in us, and as we intentionally live within the life of God, we dwell in God. Each of us illustrates the divine life in different ways. But like border collies, we live our purpose best when we are in relationship with the shepherd. The world needs people whose faces glow.

May we be a people who trust God enough to follow Jesus through death and find ourselves resurrected and unified with the divine life, a dwelling place bringing the glory of God and resurrection into the world.