

SERMON: February 14, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-9

Six days after that, Jesus took Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. And there Jesus was transfigured before their eyes; the clothes Jesus wore became dazzlingly white—whiter than any earthly bleach could make them. Elijah appeared to them, as did Moses, and the two were talking with Jesus.

Then Peter spoke to Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “how wonderful it is for us to be here! Let us make three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!”

Peter did not know what he was saying, so overcome were they all with awe. Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them; and there came a voice from out of the cloud:

“This is my Beloved, my Own; listen to this One.”

Then suddenly, when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore—only Jesus. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Promised One had risen from the dead.

I wonder if when God was telling Jesus that he was Beloved, if God wasn't also saying it to us.

I wonder if we were supposed to overhear this incredible statement of blessing and of love.

"You are my beloved!" You, yes, you.

I do not know where I got the idea that through Jesus, **God became human so that we might become divine**. . . . that God became human so that we might become Divine.

This sounds like some Eastern mysticism . . . certainly not something I picked up in the United Church of Canada. When I read through the books about the UCC, I find topics such as

- Becoming a Multiracial/Multicultural Church,
- The Theological Roots of Diversity,
- Our Entertainment of Doubt,
- Being a Covenantal Community,
- How We Make Decisions . . . etc.

In these books, there was nothing about our being able to hold divinity within our humanity as Jesus had reveal it is possible.

I became curious and wanted to know where I got the idea that through Jesus, **God became human so that we might become divine**, so I began an extensive investigation to research and discover where I had gotten this crazy idea: **that God entered into humanity so that we might be a vessel to hold divinity**.

What did I do? I **Googled**: God became human so we might become divine and . . . up popped Divinization on Wikipedia.

Divinization, also known as *apotheosis* (to make divine) or *theopoesis* (the transforming effect of divine grace) . . .

- **Theos** (“God”) has a broader meaning, referring to powers that were immortal, incorruptible, and glorious – the very words that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 to describe the resurrected body.
- **Poesis** (from Ancient Greek: ποιήσις) is "the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before." derived from the ancient Greek term "to make".

In other words, by the Grace of God we are made Divine.

You may have also heard the phrase: We are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Or have sung the words of the hymn: *"Christ has no body now but yours."
"no hands but yours to heal the wounded world, no eyes but yours to see as Christ would see, no feet but yours to journey with the poor, as Christ has blessed, so now be God's blessing."*

Well, that Wikipedia article went on and on and listed so many Early Church Fathers and Mothers. It went on and on about their understanding and their own experience of being filled with Divine Presence.

And there was a long list of Catholic teachings (you may not know that I grew up in the Catholic Faith until I became Lutheran until I became United)

Examples of Catholic teachings are:

- "Yea, I say, the Word of God became a human so that you might learn from a human how to become a god.

- "The Word was made flesh in order that we might be made gods. ... Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a human, so also, we humans are both deified through Christ's flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life."

These teachings are based on such scriptures as

- Genesis 1:26-27a: The God said: "Let us make humankind in our image to be like us." Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them. God blessed them.
- and John 14: 20: On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

In the Wikipedia articles there were lists of **Catholic Saints** --- humans who were recognized by the Catholic Church as containing the Divine. They were infused with the Holy Spirit in such obvious and active ways that they were canonized as people to be prayed through to reach God.

And there were Catholic Doctrines:

- "Through the sacraments --- baptism and communion --- we are filled with the Holy Spirit and become vessels of the divine." The Catholic Church's understanding of communion is that we literally consume the Body of Christ and become holy and connected with God so that nothing, not even our brokenness, separates us from divine love.
(If you think of our eating the bread, it eventually becomes part of our bodies.)

And the Lutheran Faith picked up on the essential nature of Baptism:

We "put on Christ, are covered by Christ, and become little Christs" --
- literally Christ-ians.

The Wikipedia article went on to include the Eastern Orthodox Church's understanding that believers attain the likeness of God and union with God through reconciliation with God.

The Anglican Church's understanding is closely aligned with the Eastern Orthodox understanding of **theopoesis**. The Quakers believe they experience celestial inhabitation and the Methodists/Wesleyans tradition places strong emphasis on entire sanctification which has many similarities with **theopoesis**.

But there was nothing in the Wikipedia article on the spirituality of the United Church of Canada.

The United Church of Canada rests on its reputation of being a national church of engaging in social justice and political action, diversity and of its being inclusive. It is not normally known for being a centre of contemplation or of being focused on sanctification.

I wonder if the United Church of Canada is missing out on something.

I wonder if we --- you and I --- are missing out on something.

I wonder if there is anything worth exploring with this theopoesis stuff.

I wonder . . .

In my connection with the **Praying with Scripture** group, I am learning that there is an interest in the daily meditations of Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest. He is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. His articles have a theopoesis flavour:

For example: Rohr articulates a transformative view of Jesus Christ as a portrait of God's constant, unfolding work in the world. "God loves things by becoming them", he writes, "and Jesus' life was meant to declare that humanity has never been separate from God" except by its own negative choice. When we recover this fundamental truth, faith becomes less about proving Jesus was God and more about learning to recognize the Creator's presence all around us and in everyone we meet. (From an advertisement for *The Universal Christ*)

I also wonder if you haven't expressed an interest growing in your own spirituality. Your interest may have been captured in the Renewal Journey Overview document compiled from interviews and surveys of First United members by Credence and Coe. (available on www.firstunitedchurch.ca).

Over the last year, you and other members of First United Church answered questions about how God

- was calling you deepen your relationship with God and one another
- was calling you to release and/or embrace?
- was calling you as a church to actions and witness in the community?

The Renewal Journey Overview document has been adopted by the Council to be the guiding document for the work of your Intentional Interim Minister, Rev. Harry Disher and for the Transition Team.

One of the identified key renewal themes is to **invigorate the congregation's spirituality.**

So, I wonder if you might be interested in doing this **theopoesis** stuff.

Since one of your resulting action items is **to develop new small groups in diverse forms including in person or online:** such as

Choir; Bible study; and Conversations that Matter about a variety of topics including matters of faith.

I wonder if you might be interested in the **small group Lenten Series**.

The Lenten Series small group will start on Wednesday night, February 24 and continue on the Wednesday nights during Lent --- basically from February 24 through to March 31. We will meet on Zoom at 7 PM for an hour to discuss "a variety of topics" including topics of faith.

If you are interested in this theoposeis stuff and would like to be in conversation with a small group of people on a mid-week, evening Zoom meeting during Lent, check out the information that will be in the upcoming First Friday's letters.

Let me return to the idea that **We Are God's Beloved**.

I want to again quote Richard Rohr. This time from his book, *The Immortal Diamond*:

Yet God is saying in all incarnations that "I am not totally Other. I have planted some of me in all things that long for reunion." It is mimicked and mirrored in erotic desire and the sexual pairing of all animals, which is why the Song of Songs, Rumi, Hafiz, Kabir, and John of the Cross could use only highly erotic images to communicate their mysticism. Absolute otherness will create only absolute alienation. (Add to that any notion of God as petty, angry, or torturing, and the mystical journey is over.) So God created human sameness and compassion in the human Jesus to overcome this tragic gap. God-in-you seeks and loves God, like a homing device that never turns off.

(Chapter 5)

Well, this quote brings us back to **our being God's Beloved**. As Richard Rohr stated, God's passion for us is "*mimicked and mirrored in erotic desire and sexual parings of all animal's . . .* the passionate love that God has placed within us for one another is an expression and an experience of the passion that God has for us. God longs to be with and within us. God longs for us to desire being with God and united with God.

We are truly God's Beloved.

And unlike the scripture passage saying, "*tell no one*" . . . we can tell everyone. We can shout out this Good News: For the promised One has been risen from the dead . . . and we are the hands and feet and eyes and ears of the Risen Christ. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit. And the grace of God flows through us.

Listen to the words of Teilhard de Chardin

**We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.
We are spiritual beings having a human experience.**

May it be so.

Thanks be to God!