

**Sermon: Path to Being Divine****Scripture: James 3:13-4:8 and Mark 9:30-37****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: September 19, 2024**

---

A couple of weeks ago I spoke about Jesus being fully God and fully human and a couple reasons why that doctrine of the church is an important one - that Jesus in being fully divine as well as fully human means he is available to us, accessible to us in a way that simply a great teacher of history is not and that the concept encourages, as Process Theology explains, a relationship to God that empowers us as co-Creators with God.

But here's another thing to think on. The teaching opens a space not just for us to be followers of Jesus Christ, learning from his teachings and imitating Him, but it encourages us to become him, to become divine, to seek Godhood, to pursue Christhood ourselves. It may sound a little scandalous but it is an ancient Christian teaching.

Irenaues, the Bishop of Lyon, in the 2nd century said "He became what we are so that we might become what he is."

The theologian and Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, in the 4th century said - "for the Son of God became human so that we can become God."

The Theologian and Philosopher, Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century said "The only Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that HE made human might make humans gods."

And such statements as this from the New Testament itself, in Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians: "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

What if that is our task as humans is to become, ourselves fully human and fully divine?

Theology, the study of God, tells us as much about ourselves as it does about God and Christian theology has a particular way of speaking of what the human being is - our predicament, our purpose, our aim, which is distinct from other explanations offered out there about who we are and where we are going. For instance that we are random accidents of existence with no higher point to our lives at all. Or from some perspective we are primarily consumers, cogs in the economy and our desires and attention are commodities to be bought and sold.

But what the Christian faith says about our human nature is that because we are created children of God we have inherent dignity and value, every one of us. And it speaks of how we are hung somewhere between heaven and earth, between our limited nature and the so much more that we can imagine, between finitude and infinity, between life and death, hung suspended between being creature and being creator. And it is this in-between state that most all our struggles derive. We have this sense of perfection that tortures us because of our imperfection. We have this certain capacity for power and control that frustrates us because we are also powerless and out of control of so much. We have a sense of the infinite but see our death and the finitude of our lives coming at us and the ones we love like a freight train. Poor tortured creatures we are.

Now to this predicament Christianity does not say - “get over it! Too bad! You are not infinite your finite, deal with it.” Nor does Christianity say “you’re imperfect in the face of perfection, accept your imperfection.” Christianity doesn’t say, “hey buddy, deal with it, you’re human and not god, stop trying to play god, end of story.” No, it’s more nuanced and more complicated than that.

Our faith tradition says yes, you’re a part of the earth and finite in that way, from dust you have come to dust you shall return, but your birthright and your destination is set towards infinity, eternity. Christianity acknowledges that we are imperfect, sometimes very very much so, but encourages us to strive towards the perfect. Jesus says to us “be perfect as my Father in heaven is perfect”. There is a more perfect You and more perfect union of You and God. Strive for it. Of course be careful of how easily you can defeat and undermine yourself and others in that striving but strive away. It says - Oh you want to be God then seek God, strive to be God, go for it.

BUT here’s the kicker: be very clear on who this God is toward which you strive.

The scriptures tell us who this God is, primarily through Jesus, the image of the invisible God. This morning’s passage from Mark shows the striking dichotomy between the god-complexes of the disciples striving to be the greatest amongst themselves and Lord it over one another and the God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus has just come to realize that as he understands his divinity, his Christhood, it is going to be very different from what anyone else would want or expect of being a Savior... you know, the fame, admiration, adoration, power, glory, privileges, greatness...none of that. Actually quite the opposite of all of that is what he’s in for he

realizes. Not fame but notoriety, not admiration but disgust (him bloodied and dying on the cross), not adoration but people walking away from him, not power but powerlessness unto death, not glory but shame and obscurity, not privileges but whatever is the opposite of privileges, discounted, not being seen as great but as weak and so forth and so on. And this we say is God, while the disciples in the god-complexes argue amongst themselves about which of them is the greatest. ANd Jesus is like “oi vey!”

Human nature - we desire God, to become as gods, to be the center of the universe, and it's quite built into us that desire, and yet we make a project of it under our own terms, for our own sake, while God calls us through Jesus to Godhood for the sake of the world. Made in the image of the triune loving God we are to be self-pouring out towards all around us, not grasping and collecting in towards our own glory, but glorying in God and God's creation towards the good of it all. We are made to desire God, to desire to become Christ not because then we will be great but because then we will be a part of This Great Project that is God's to redeem the world and this existence, that somehow has gotten so out of whack.

“Who is wise and understanding among you?” James asks. “Who is great among you?” Jesus asks. James and Jesus say together - “let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in humility.” That's the path to greatness and wisdom and honor. “Come near to God and God will come near to you.” Seek to become God and God will become you. But you'll have to put off the deeds of darkness, Paul says, holding out for truth above lies even when it costs you. Pressing in for the common good even when it costs your personal good. You'll have to swallow pride and work on humility, without resentment. You'll have to seek harder to understand the

other above working to prove yourself right and justified. You'll have to see the enemy as sister and the foreigner as family and return love for hate.

All of this Jesus makes clear, is the path to God, to become a part of God, to become God ourselves, which is our birthright and which is the only path toward being our authentic selves. There is no other path. Jesus' path is the way, "the way the truth and the life, no one comes to God but through him", in that way. It's not "you have to become Christian to know God or get to God" but you do have to go the way of Jesus - the way of honesty, humility, trust, giving of self, love... that's the way of Jesus and the way to God, the way we are meant for. All the other ways lead to somewhere else, somewhere less real, less vital, less true, less being than fully human and fully God, which is the place to which we are called. Can you hear the voice calling you? It's there in the distance, audible only if you listen carefully.