

Maundy Thursday 2021
Participating in the Life of God
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I came across this blog reflection the other day...

Imagine for a moment being a 13 year old boy. Another young person who you look up to ... the supposedly cool musical, intelligent and sporty one who's part of a group you want to be a part of... sends you a message with a video link of himself and some of his friends playing football.

You are surprised and secretly delighted that he would want to share this video with you and so you immediately click the link and revel in watching all the magnificent action of kicks on goal, headers and various tricks.

Now imagine sometime later, the same lad doesn't just share a video link with you, but he invites you to participate in playing football with him and his buddies. You are beside yourself with joy since you've been practicing in the garden day and night so as to gain the skills needed just in case such an opportunity presented itself.

The two of you walk over to the park and for two glorious hours you are smack bang in the middle of it all – running around until your legs feel like gelatine, sweating until the perspiration stings your eyes, and attentively attuning your every move to your teammates. And when you're done, satisfaction and fulfilment bursts forth from every pore for the privilege of participating in not only this event but this friendship group... these new relationships!

This story appeals to me as a someone who was once a sporty youngster, but also one who now gets a real insight into the world of teenagers and friendship dynamics... albeit girls rather than boys!

Yet more importantly this simple story illustrates the difference between 'sharing' something versus 'participating' in it. The difference between 'share' and 'participate' may seem like a minor wrangling over words until you reflect on that story! One involves experiencing the reality as an outsider; the other involves experiencing the reality of full invitation and participation on the inside.

God doesn't just want to share His life with us. God wants us to participate in the divine life, and for us to have union with him... to draw us into that Divine Dance (Richard Rohr) of Trinitarian life inspiring and fulfilling our lives. That's what Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection accomplishes for us... the ability to participate fully in the life of God.

Sharing is great, and it is a word that certainly has its place as we share a bottle of wine or share a joke, but when it comes to our life in, and with God there is something in the word that could imply a certain distance. We can share a room with others, but not participate in what's going on. We can share a meal but not fully engage and participate in the conversation. (Sharing is a word used in some translation of the Scriptures ... "share Christ's sufferings" 1 Peter 4:13 e.g. Good News Bible, when others use the work partake or participate e.g. NIV, NRSV and King James.)

Participating in the life of God conveys more fully the nature of what we are invited into. Just like that young lad pouring his heart and soul, mind and body into that football match... we are involved in a participating in the life of God. We are not just bystanders, or onlookers but engaged participants.

What does Participation in the life of God look like?

Invitation: Participate in taking the Towel.

Participation in the life of God looks like Jesus' mission of humble service; to not just be a bystander who sees the needs of the world and thinks the world should be a better place... but one who like Jesus is prepared to take a towel and wash feet; to do what Jesus did. To offer ourselves in humble service; to wash the feet of friends and enemies... yes, Judas was present in the Upper Room and had his feet washed. To serve others as we are called by God without prejudice and discrimination, no matter who they are, whatever the cost if it's what God wants, and no matter how unpleasant it might be we submit ourselves to the call of God, just like Jesus.

“Too many of us are standing in dignity, hands folded, when we should be kneeling in service, washing feet.”

One who participates in the life of God will participate in selfless humble service to one’s neighbour and enemy.

Invitation: Participate in the Body of Christ

Participation in the life of God means participating in the Body of Christ... to be an active lively participating member... an active body part. One who gathers around the Table with Jesus and Jesus’ friends and listens on his every word. The one who only shares in the life of the church may watch from afar or dip in and out. Whereas the one who participates in the Body of Christ is engaged in a whole different way and she or he goes from the Table and puts the words of Jesus into practice living out a Spirit filled life in the world. Participation in the life of God leads us to participation in community, to love one another; lead us to forgiveness and reconciliation; to be in communion with the Lord and with others... deep relationship, unity and service... a breaking open and sharing of oneself with and for others... just like that broken body and this broken bread.

Invitation: Participate in prayer

Participation in the life of God, as we hear in the Gethsemane, means ‘staying with Jesus’ ‘remaining with Jesus’ ‘watching and praying with Jesus.’ Letting our lives be fully informed and transformed through the beautiful presence of God. To entrust and abandon our whole selves and our whole lives to the love and will of God whatever the circumstances.

Invitation: Participate in the Cross

Participation in the life of God means walking with Jesus the Way of the Cross. It’s not only sharing the message of the Cross with others by saying how incredible the sacrifice of Jesus is, but to participate fully in the mystery of the Cross and Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. Denying ourselves, taking up the cross and following Jesus wherever he calls us. Nailing our burdens our selfish desires, our sinful nature to the Cross and embracing the call to new identity, new family, new relationships, new hope and new life.

The church has re-enacted things like the washing of feet or the Passion, in order to try and get a better handle on what God is asking up to participate in. The danger of course is always that we share in the outward ceremony or ritual but miss the significant of living it out. We might wash feet on Maundy Thursday but not engage in any form of loving humble service day to day.

Participation in the Life of God is about our approach, our attitude and action... we get involved and immersed. As we do so we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus and participate in the eternal love and life of the Trinity.

As you and I receive Holy Communion on this special night, whatever your theology is, we are not just receiving bread and wine and remembering something from 2,000 years ago we are participating in, engaging with, immersing ourselves in what Christ has done for us eternally on the Cross.

This Holy table is a reminder of Christ Jesus’ perfect self giving and sacrifice... God giving himself to us and the world wholly and fully, in the person of Jesus.

[Christ made] by his one oblation of himself once offered... a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world; (Common Worship)

We are invited to respond and wholly give ourselves to him and participate in his life...

(We) receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ’s holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, [are] partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood. (Common Worship)

Don’t be a bystander, a watcher or a gazer of Jesus. Walk with him this day. Invite him into your home for tea (Zacchaeus Luke 19:5)! Let him make his home in you (Ephesians 3:17-19 and John 14:23) and participate in the life of God.