

Apotheosis: an evolution
2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2 February 14, 2010
Evolution Sunday – Valentine’s Day

Apotheosis

How many of you know what “Apotheosis” means?

How many of you have read Dan Brown’s book, “The Lost Symbol”?

How many of you had ever heard the word “Apotheosis” before you read Dan Brown’s book?

Well, after today you will know what it means and you will be doing it.

Apotheosis means -- the elevation or exaltation of a person to the rank of a god.

That of course was something that happened on a fairly regular basis to very, very, very, important people in the days of the Greek and Roman Empires.

The Caesars were all believed to be sons of God who upon death were elevated to the rank of god.

That should sound familiar, who else do we know who fits that description – yes, Jesus.

But there was someone more recent who according to the dome of the US Capitol rotunda underwent apotheosis – and who can tell me who that was?

Yes – George Washington.

Apotheosis was something that happened to the very most important people – which was why it was so scandalous that in the first century some people were claiming that this insignificant Mediterranean Jewish peasant who was executed for sedition and died a humiliating death on a cross was being held up as one who had achieved apotheosis.

But according to the Gospel of John, Jesus held that even the lowliest of the lowest were gods; a teaching echoed by the Apostle Paul in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

And you all are thinking, “WHAT?”

Let's take a look.

Let's start of course with Jesus.

According the Gospel of John, Jesus had just said,
“The Father and I are one.”

Now this just perturbed the heck of those standing around who thought this was entirely blasphemous. So they picked stones to throw at him and stone him to death.

To which Jesus quickly regained his rhetorical footing and said,

“Wait, wait, wait... hold on here, just one second. I have shown you many good works from God. Which one of these are you stoning me for?”

To which the crowd replied,

“It’s not for your works that we are going to stone you but rather, for your blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.”

Ah, but Jesus was quick, and retorted,

“Wait, wait,... you can’t lay that one on me. “Is it not written in the holy scriptures?

In fact, in the Psalms it is written that God said, ‘I said, you are gods.’”

Jesus went on to point out that,

“If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son.’”

Now clearly the logic behind Jesus argument, that saved him from being stoned, is that we all are sons and daughters of God, we are all gods, so he is not claiming anything blasphemous.

Now while this story we find in John's gospel is not found in the other gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke;

we do get a similar teaching in the letters of Paul, in fact the one we just read this morning.

To the church in Corinth Paul writes,

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, **are being transformed into the same image** from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

But this really shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us.

It may come as a surprise to some of those reading Dan Brown's book, but not to us.

We all know that there is but one God who is above all and through all and in all. [Eph 4:6]

We all know that it is the breath of God, the Spirit of God that is our true essence and gives us life.

But then why do we all seem so ungodly.

Why do we all do such horrible things to one another?

Why do we hide our heads in the sand and allow things like the poverty in Haiti and the famine in Darfur?

Why do we seem so mortal, so earth bound, so sinful, so limited in our ability to get things right?

Well, the answer is pretty simple.
We just haven't quite evolved yet to our fullest potential; personally or as a species.

*As Paul said, we are being transformed into the same image [the image of God] **from one degree of glory to another**; -- one degree of glory to another.*

We are still in the evolutionary process of transformation, going from one degree to another and we as individuals and as a species aren't quite there yet.

Now we have come a long way as indicated by the triune nature of our brains that have evolved over millions of years to what we have now. Yes, there are three parts to our brain that have evolved to what we have now.

First, the reptilian brain, the oldest of the three, controls the body's vital functions such as heart rate, breathing, body temperature and balance.

Our reptilian brain includes the main structures found in a reptile's brain: the brainstem and the cerebellum. The reptilian brain is reliable but tends to be somewhat rigid and compulsive.

Second, the limbic brain emerged in the first mammals.

It can record memories of behaviors that produced agreeable and disagreeable experiences, so it is responsible for what are called emotions in human beings.

The limbic brain is the seat of the value judgments that we make, often unconsciously, that exert such a strong influence on our behavior.

And third, the neocortex first assumed importance in primates and culminated in the human brain with its two large cerebral hemispheres that play such a dominant role.

These hemispheres have been responsible for the development of human language, abstract thought, imagination, and consciousness.

The neocortex is flexible and has almost infinite learning abilities.

The neocortex is also what has enabled human cultures to develop.

http://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/d/d_05/d_05_cr/d_05_cr/her/d_05_cr/her.html

It is also believed that the development of the neocortex is what allowed for our awareness of ourselves, of God, of the spiritual and the ability to be religious.

It is the neocortex that makes us human. One might say, that it is what makes us to be in the image of God.

It is this development of the brain that allows us to understand Human Rights, Civil Rights.

It is this level of the brain that allows us to move beyond self-interest and to perceive the needs of others as equal or even paramount to our own. It is this level of the brain that truly allows for us to love.

Now I'm not talking about simple animal attraction, or lust, which finds its origin in the lower regions of the brain; but rather, the ability to enhance the value of another even at times at the expense of the self. It is the neocortex that allows us to see that what gives us value is not the feeding and care of our selves, but the feeding and care of others.

It is this level of the brain that we are still developing and learning how to use. It is this level of the brain that make us gods; that is, those who, like God, have the ability to create and to love.

The future is exciting.

It is nothing less than exciting to think of where our abilities may take us over the next few thousand years, if we can keep from being guided by the lower regions of our brains and destroying ourselves and our environment.

It is even more exciting to think of what we may evolve into in a million years.

But for now, we have all that we need within our grasp.

In fact, it is our firm belief that two thousand years ago, one man figured out how to achieve the full usage of all the gifts God has given us.

He showed us our true potential and what it means to be totally filled with the Spirit of God and he gave us a model to duplicate in our own lives.

The Apostle Paul told us,

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [1 Cor 3:16]

Ah, but let's not get too snooty.

We are not saying we are God, but rather that God dwells in us, and that we are gods in that we

have the ability to create and to love; two divine gifts that we are called to perfect.

So I leave you with this injunction, get on with your apotheosis.

AMEN.