

“True Life”

I am going to start with a question. How many of you have done something in your youth that you would rather no one knows or remembers? We are often foolish in our youth. It is usually about testing boundaries with our parents, our friends, or ourselves. Sometimes we get embarrassed. Sometimes we get injured. Sometimes the result is something terrible. If we are lucky, our testing of boundaries does not change our life for the worse.

As we get older, we should get wiser. We learn where the boundaries are in life. We are not so much beholden to our parents or friends as we are to ourselves. We realize that doing some things is just plain stupid. Then again, some people never learn. We can see the extreme of this through the Darwin Awards. For those who do not know what the Darwin Awards are, the website indicates that they “honor those who tip chlorine into our gene pool, by accidentally removing their own DNA from it during the spectacular climax of a ‘great idea’ gone vandy, viddy wrong.”¹ Wikipedia says “The Darwin Awards are a tongue-in-cheek honor given posthumously ... to individuals who supposedly ‘improve the human gene pool’ by eliminating themselves through an extraordinary display of foolishness.”²

We have choices in life. The psalmist pleads with God, “Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; / remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O Lord.”³ The psalmist wants to be sure he gets forgiveness, so he goes on to flatter the Lord. I do not think God is susceptible to flattery, but I suppose it doesn’t hurt to try. These verses are a plea for forgiveness surrounded by praise to God and a pledge to henceforth lead an upright life. How many times have we made promises to God to get ourselves out of a predicament? The psalmist does not seem to be in a jam, but the plea is genuine.

In contrast, the passage from Philippians is not a pledge to change our ways but is a hymn to Christ. It is setting forth an example of how a follower of Christ is to live. We are to imitate Christ by the model he set of *kenosis*. *Kenosis* is a Greek word which means emptying. In Biblical interpretation, it refers to Christ’s self-emptying. Christ, as the preexistent Word of God, voluntarily humbles himself by taking on human form. He empties himself of his divine status and powers to become human.

For us, *kenosis* is an emptying of our ego and our self-importance. By doing so, we make room for God to work through us to enact the Divine will. One who has given up the self for God does not become a puppet or an automaton. That person is still a unique human being, but that person is not

¹ <https://darwinawards.com/> accessed September 26, 2026

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwin_Awards accessed September 26, 2026

³ Psalm 25:6 BCP

living for his or her desires but for the desires of God. Saints are a splendid example of such a person. The most complete are those who give up their whole life for God. The best example I know of is St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis had a life of comfort as the son of an upper middle-class trader in luxury cloth. The kinds of cloth used to make the garments of aristocrats. His father's wealth allowed Francis to live the life of a playboy who spent much of his time partying and carousing with his buddies. His father was also able to outfit Francis as a knight with armor, sword, and horse. Francis went into battle on behalf of Assisi against other regional city-states.

One day, while riding in the country, Francis came across the derelict church of San Damiano. He dismounted, and while looking at the structure, he was drawn to the cross hanging there. He began to contemplate the cross when Jesus began to speak to him. Jesus said, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My church which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." Francis took this literally and stole money from his father to give to the priest to help repair San Damiano. The priest did not want stolen money and threw it out the window.

When his father accused him of theft and threatened to disown him, Francis stripped himself of his clothes in the town square and disowned his father. He stated that his only father was his Father in heaven. Francis decided he should do the work of rebuilding the church himself. It took quite a while because he had to beg for stones and supplies to do the work. He became the laughingstock of Assisi. Yet as he continued his work, others were inspired to join in.

Over time, his reputation grew, and people from all over Western Europe joined his movement. Bishops and the Pope became aware of Francis and his Friars. Their awareness became worry. While Francis may not have realized what the voice from the cross meant, others did. Jesus meant that the Church with a capital C needed rebuilding. The Church was falling into corruption and obsession with material wealth. Francis's turn to a simple life modeled on Jesus inspired people and threatened the church hierarchy.

He may not have known it, but Francis was putting on the cloak of *kenosis*. He had emptied himself of his ego and reliance on money and prestige. He had given himself entirely over to God. He had emptied himself to serve God and others.

It is possible to give oneself completely over to God. The more stuff we have, the harder it may be, but Francis proved that it is possible. What part of our lives do we need to empty to give more of ourselves over to God? Ponder and act. Remember that the mistakes of your youth have been forgiven. Do not let them or your prosperity hold you back. This self-emptying is not just for men. St. Clare, Francis' friend, did the same and founded a companion order to the Franciscans, the Poor Clares, whose ministry continues to this day.

The Rev. Eugene LeCouteur
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The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A
Holy Eucharist, 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
September 27, 2026

To paraphrase Jesus from earlier in Matthew, in order to find our life, we have to lose it. That is, we must lose what we think is our life in order to find our true life. The life that God made us for. However, the idea of losing our life is frightening. In order to do it, we have to trust in God. We have to be willing to lose our selfishness, ego, craving, and lust in order to find our true self. We must put ourselves to the test by giving all of our life over to the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of us all. Then we will see what joy we find and what joy we can give. If we give ourselves over to God, even just a little bit, we will find a life that we cannot have asked for or imagined. But it will be a life that is true.