

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Persecution in Discipleship Second Day of the Octave of Christmas **St. Stephen**, The First Martyr Tuesday, December 26, 2017 8:15 AM **Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Mt 10:17-22** (Pouring oneself out and ultimately merging with God.)

If someone would wish to elaborate those elements of Jesus' teaching which are unique, you could begin with this long section in Matthew's Gospel on persecution. **Jesus identifies persecution as a fundamental quality that adheres to the disciple, and a fundamental challenge a disciple has to accept in order to be worthy of discipleship.** I think this is unique. I don't think any religious leader in the history of the world ever actually broadcasted to would-be followers that following is going to lead to persecution and even to the point of death. Usually leaders promise good things. Well of course persecution is not a good thing, but it's a means toward a good thing, and that is the ultimate glory of God. **Jesus' whole idea of life is something to be given away.** Philippians has that beautiful hymn: "Son though he was Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself." His life was an emptying of himself, and so for him **discipleship is following in the way of self-emptying.**

Now Stephen takes the same tack in a section that was not read this morning, but it's part of this whole Acts of the Apostles. This is first of all chapter 6: 8-10 and then a few verses are skipped, and then we go to 7:54 and onward. So there is a section skipped. In that section **Stephen says** the same thing. He talks about how **the elders and the leaders have always persecuted all the real prophets.** And now, of course this is after Jesus' death and resurrection Stephen is speaking. He said, "Now you have killed the Son of God himself." So that's the whole idea of **pouring oneself out. That's what Jesus came for, and that's what he is calling his followers to: a life, yes, poured out and ultimately merging with God.**

Now whether this is attractive or not is the issue. To be attracted to this in the first place means one is already serious about following God. And yet it is very clear that the whole gospel is written for everyone. So **how does this get translated** into something else? And the answer is **through the witness of the disciple.**