

February 13, 2011
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Philippians 2:1-11

Who is Jesus? Jesus' Humanity

Scripture

Our scripture reading for today comes from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. Paul writes to this church to encourage them in a time of suffering. The church in Philippi is being persecuted – they are suffering because of their faith. This suffering has a physical reality to it, no doubt, but it is more than that – it is the kind of suffering that comes from being excluded, from being talked about badly, from being ridiculed in public. This suffering is taking its toll on them and on their faith.

So Paul writes to them this beautiful letter of encouragement. He empathizes with them for he too is suffering – imprisoned possibly in Rome. He shares his great affection for them. He speaks of his own faith tried and tested – producing an abundance of joy. He reminds them of God's faithfulness to them and enormous gift that they have received in Christ Jesus. He encourages them to stand fast in their faith – he reminds them to live as God's people – loved – freed – redeemed – by Jesus. He calls them to live a life worthy of the gospel – one that is marked by joy and generosity – by humility and concern for the other.

In our reading today we hear that high call of discipleship as Paul asks us to be of the same mind, to the same love as Jesus – the mind and the love that is devoid of selfish ambition and conceit and is focused on service to other. How is this possible? Through Jesus. Through Jesus'

willingness to become one of us – to live a human life – to become a servant of others – to live and to die in obedience to God.

Prayer

Sermon

You know what we say about Jesus? We say that Jesus was ‘*eternally begotten of the Father*’ (Nicene Creed) and he was ‘*born of the virgin Mary*’ (Apostles Creed). We say that Jesus “*is the eternal Son of the Father, who became human and lived among us...*” (Confession of 1967 9.07) We say that he, Jesus, was both ‘*fully human and fully God*’. (Brief Statement of Faith 10.2 line 8).

That is what we say. But I have to wonder if that is what we really believe – I mean that Jesus was fully human and fully God.

I am not even sure what that I know what that looks like or what that means. 😊

It seems like every time I speak of Jesus’ humanity that I diminish his divinity and that every time I speak of Jesus’ divinity (his God-ness) I diminish his humanity. But there is something important at stake here (in making sure we differentiate between Christ’s humanity and his divinity) – because the church – the wider church – the church that is catholic – that is universal – exceeding all time and place – has for over two thousand years been defending the fact that Jesus was indeed fully human and fully God. And to be quite honest there is something

important at stake for us today because how we understand Who Jesus Is – will inform how we live.

This morning we begin a four week series looking at the person of Jesus Christ in order that we might see, more clearly, how Jesus' humanity and his divinity transform our lives and our living. – We are going to start today by looking at Jesus' humanity.

Let me confess to you here and now that I often find myself embracing a way of thinking about Jesus' divinity and his humanity that is referred to as 'docetism'. Oh I am not alone – people have been thinking this way for thousands of years – and the truth of the matter is that you yourself probably find yourself thinking this more often than you might realize.

Docetism comes from the “Greek verb that means “to seem””¹. In other words Jesus – the Jesus born of Mary – the Jesus who grew up in Nazareth – the one who shared the love of God in a life of self-less-ness throughout the Galilee – the one who went to the cross for us and for our salvation in Jerusalem – this Jesus only ‘seemed’ human. The ‘docetist’ sees Jesus maybe like we would see one of our super hero’s only in reverse.

Clarke Kent – becomes Superman. Peter Parker becomes Spiderman. Bruce Wayne becomes Batman. The Son of God becomes Jesus – putting on the costume of our humanity while retaining all his god-ness.

There is another train of thought about Jesus that has been around forever as well. This train of thought, called Apollianarism, sees Jesus as one part this and one part that. It is a mixing of

Jesus' humanity and his divinity. This mixing happens not in the way that you would make a cake where all the ingredients combine but it's more like parts and pieces. It thinks to itself that I know that Jesus was human – that he was bodily – just like us – had all the working parts – and yet – the part that makes him who he is and the part that makes us who we are – the part we often refer to as the soul – at his psychological center if you will – Jesus was divine.

But this isn't what we say and it isn't what we mean when we say that Jesus was fully human.

So let's think together what it means to be fully human. At our most basic level what does it mean to be human?

To be human is to be vulnerable – it is to have needs.

The need to eat and drink – to go to the bathroom.

The need to be loved – cared about.

The need to find meaning in the midst of one's life.

The need to be in community with others.

To be human is to grow and to learn – to be constantly growing.

Learning is not just about succeeding – human learning comes from trial and error.

Learning is about changing – adapting – whether we are 2 or 102.

To be human is to experience the wide range of human emotion.

Joy and sorrow

Love and hate

Satisfaction and frustration

To be human is to be a sexual being – our sexuality is not bad – (we can use it just like we can our other ‘created’ gifts in ways that are self serving and abusive.) but our sexuality is a ‘good’ gift – God made us in this way.

To be human is to know the reality of being mortal – human.

Bones break

Bodies get sick

Pain can cripple us

Aging affects us

To be human is to have a great desire to survive – to struggle – to wrestle – against death no matter what form it might come for us.

If we know what it means for us to be human – **what does it mean for Jesus to be human?**

It means that Jesus was born just as we are born – small and vulnerable – It means that Jesus needed his momma and daddy. It means that Jesus got hungry and thirsty. It means that Jesus felt the pain of a skinned knee and hurtful words. It means that Jesus knew the confusion of puberty. It means that there were days he was endlessly grumpy and that there were days where he was the zealot of happiness.

It means he learned things just like you and I – by working at them – by trial and error – by succeeding and failing. It means that his hands got dirty and his feet hurt. It means that he got frustrated. (Remember him cursing the fig?) It means that he was impatient. (Remember how he wondered if his disciples would ever get it?) It means that he got angry. (Remember how he turned over the tables of the moneychangers at the Temple?)

It means that he loved and needed to be loved. It means that he found joy and sorrow in his relationships with others. It means that Jesus was a spiritual creature – trying always to connect with his creator. It also means that he was a religious creature – looking for ways to express his spirituality in community with others.

For Jesus to be human means that he needed his rest – needed to sleep – and it means that he needed to find ways of doing things that were meaningful. It means that he celebrated with friends and family (Wedding at Cana, the house of Simon the Leper) and he grieved their deaths (Lazarus). It means that at times he loved to be with the crowds and other times he needed to get away from it all.

It means that he embraced his sexuality. (Don't miss understand what I am saying here. I do not know how Jesus lived out his sexuality but I do know that for Jesus to be human means that he embraced his sexuality and lived it out in ways that reflected the goodness of God's creative purpose.)

For Jesus to be human means that he struggled and rebelled against death. It means he felt the pain of each lash and each harsh word. It means that even as he went to the cross the agony of death was as heavy as the weight of the cross.

For Jesus to be fully human means that Jesus never realized he was God but realized he was in communion – relationship with God. For Jesus to be human means that he was not perfect – but it is also to say that he lived his life in perfect obedience to God.

The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus was “*tempted in every way as we are ...but that he did not sin.*” (Hebrews 4:15) – This sin-less-ness of Jesus seems contrary to our human nature – ‘for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’.

Theologian Shirley Guthrie in addressing this points us back to God’s created reality for humanity – for you and me. He reminds us that we are created in the image of God and we are created good. In understanding Jesus’ sin-less-ness Guthrie calls us to remember this created reality – which each of us are called to live into each and every day. “*Jesus*”, Guthrie says, “*fulfilled his true humanity in the image of God. He lived always, without exception, in perfect love for God and other people.*”

To say that Jesus was any more or any less than us – is to deny what Paul says to us today – that although ‘*Jesus – was in the form of God – he did not regard his equality with God as something to be exploited – instead he emptied himself out – taking the form of a slave – (giving up his divine right) and became human.*’

So what is at stake here for us today? To deny Jesus' full humanity – to say that Jesus 'seemed' to be human – to say that Jesus retained an important part of his divinity – to say that Jesus was a part of this (human) and a part of that (divine) – is to say that Jesus did not experience life as we know it. It is to say that this God of the Hebrews – is really no different than the Greek gods who were this mix of god and human – often coming in human form to visit for awhile.

It is to say that God cannot truly sympathize with us in our weakness. It is to say that we cannot truly be in communion (relationship) with our God as Jesus was (that there will always be a barrier to prevent us from drawing close).

To see Jesus as something more than fully human is to deny the value that God places on humanity. It means that God still remains inaccessible to us – that somehow we must garner special knowledge or special wisdom (Gnosticism) so that we might 'know' who God is and how it is that we should live. It is to say that we could never live like Jesus lived.

And isn't that what Paul is calling us to today – to be encouraged in Christ – to have the same mind – a mind that was just like yours and mine. Isn't Paul calling us to live lives defined by love – devoid of selfishness and pride – guided by humility and service to others.

Maybe we are thinking – I can't be Christ-like. But we can – because Christ – in his full humanity – was no more or no less than we are.

What is at stake here is hope – hope for today and tomorrow. Hope that does not wait for some super hero to come and rescue us. Hope that is not depended on something we as humans have not been given. But hope that this old world can change and be different – because we ourselves can change and be different. Hope that is found not in the power but hope that is found in the midst of human weakness – in humility – in concern for the other. Hope that is found in the person of Jesus

Who, though he was in the form of God,

Did not consider equality with God as something to be held on to, exploited

But instead, he emptied himself,

Taking on the form of our humanity (becoming a slave to its weakness)

Being born in human likeness.

And being human – fully human,

He humbled himself – and became obedient – to the point of death.

Therefore – it is human weakness – the weakness that Jesus' life embodies

That is exalted – lifted up.

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend

And every tongue confess

That Jesus is Lord – the one who will lead us in living out our true humanity.

To the glory of God. Amen.

¹ Guthrie, Shirley, Christian Doctrine, p 237