

"You're Only Human"

Deut 30:15-19a; 1 Cor 3:1-9; Matt 5:21-24

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As I read the words of Paul to a divided church in Corinth, who were at odds in part because of who *baptized* them... which Paul thought was pretty ridiculous... I was struck by his question: "Are you not human?" 'Are you not a 'human bean' just like the rest of us? None of you are perfect, are you?'

These would certainly seem to be 'rhetorical' inquiries. Just like them, OF COURSE we're not perfect. Of course we're 'human.' The trouble is, we can use that 'humanity' as an easy out for our behavior. When we make a mistake, or we hurt someone's feelings, it is easy to say, either out loud or to ourselves, 'Well, I AM only *human!*'

Which, while true, can become a cop out. An easy way to slough off bad behavior, or to avoid confrontation... from either side. I would hazard to say that many of you know someone who can say some really rude or mean things, and the stock comment is, 'Well... that's just the way he/she is.' Which can come out of that sense of resignation to a long-standing personality problem that it won't do any good to say anything, OR from that typical perspective for 'GRITS'... 'Girl/Guys Raised in the South': we HATE that big 'c' word. No, not cancer. Well, almost as much as that. '**confrontation.**'

The truth is, there are times when we absolutely must call 'BS.' Where someone's behavior NEEDS to be 'confronted.' Along the lines of that famous saying attributed to English philosopher Edmund Burke: "*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men (or women) to do nothing.*" Part of the reason that people's insensitivity... oh heck, RUDE behavior... has become so epidemic is in the name of 'progress'... at least in the area of 'communication.' Or LACK of it. FaceBook. 'Social platforms' can be anything BUT 'social.' Heck, even that 'ancient' form of messaging... emails... can create in people a sense of security... or IN-security... to say anything that they dang well please. Things that they would never say 'face-to-face.'

BUT, as people get bolder, they can get to the point where the WOULD say it face-to-face. Witness the most recent state-of-the-union address, where a United States congressional representative yelled out during the President's speech. I don't care how much one might disagree with another politician. We are talking the PRESIDENT of the United States. Arguably

the most powerful and prestigious position in the WORLD. If one doesn't respect another person, that's bad enough. But at least respect the POSITION.

Paul certainly had a problem with the bitterness and disputes that the CHURCH was having with one another... especially in their 'position' as a 'representative' of the Christian faith. The tone for this first letter to the Corinthians was set in the opening chapter when he implores them that ***"there may be no divisions among you... perfectly united in mind and thought."*** (1:10) Fine upstanding church members were, in truth, acting no better, or WORSE, than the larger community of 'non-believers.' And there, but for God's grace, go WE! As I've said before, too often "the most damaging witness to the Christian faith is CHRISTIANS!"

These two passages remind us of how to be better 'witnesses' to this faith we profess. And funny, I think that they go back to that 5 word description of ALL of God's word: "Love God... Love one another." Jesus speaks to the latter... how we combat that misguided cop-out, 'We're only human.' By treating our fellow 'humans' better! One is by bearing in mind the power of our WORDS.

Jesus begins by comparing physical murder to verbal 'assassination.' He says that if one is 'angry' with another person... if we 'insult' a 'brother or sister'... if we say to someone 'you fool'.... We will be ***"liable to the hell of fire."*** WOW! I think that the word 'fool' is REALLY low on the totem pole of 'insults' that we might use. (I had to laugh at a synonym used by one commentary: "airhead!") Regardless, CLEARLY the manner in which we treat each other... the manner by which we live out our human relationships... is a BIG DEAL to our Lord. According to Jesus, 'verbal abuse' of others can carry with it the death penalty...

This importance He bears witness to in the closing two verses. ***"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; FIRST be reconciled to your brother or sister, and THEN come and offer your gift."*** (Mt. 5:23-24)

Two things of note: One, he tells the faithful giver to leave his offering at the altar and FIRST reconcile with his sister or brother. Once that is done, THEN he/she is to come back to offer up their gift. RECONCILIATION WITH ONE ANOTHER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR OFFERINGS TO GOD! (Sorry, Operations and Finance Committees!!) In the words of that old

Beatles' song, 'Money can't buy you love.' God's, or one another's. (Now, on the eve of Valentine's Day, however, money CAN help a little...)

Second, note to whom this order to reconcile is given to. Not the 'plaintiff,' not the one wronged, but the accused... the offender. You and I need to be mindful of anyone whom we have injured, whom we have hurt, and make the first move in humbly seeking forgiveness. Which is not easy to do. That's why there is so much truth in that familiar saying attributed to a 'pope'... not the Roman Catholic leader, but the English poet Alexander: *"To err is human, to forgive Divine."* Take the high road in admitting guilt. Even if there is *shared* guilt. When we take the lead in seeking forgiveness, it makes it a LOT easier for someone else to join the 'bandwagon.' One of the greatest verses in Scripture is ***"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up!"*** (James 4:10)

And speaking of 'humility,' it brings me to the 1 Corinthians passage which addresses how we better demonstrate our love of GOD. Paul is pretty miffed at the Corinthian church for getting so caught up in who baptized them, and taking sides on who was better in leading people to the Lord. He implores them, ***"What is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants, through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but GOD gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but ONLY GOD GIVES THE GROWTH."*** (1 Cor. 3:5-7)

It is such humility that must be evident in ALL that we attempt to do for God. In all the 'plans' we come up with to serve our Lord, whether its in our church or in our individual lives, ultimately we should remember the truth of another old saying: 'Man plans, and God laughs.' We must never forget that GOD ALONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUCCESS OF ANY CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. GOD ALONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUCCESS OF ANY CHRISTIAN. I'm only human. You're only human. However, we serve a mighty God...

As we grapple with human relationships that are not easy, in which we will make mistakes... as we struggle with Divine relationship, which also isn't easy, in which we definitely make mistakes... you and I must continue to humbly admit, "I'm only human." This is NOT an **excuse to fall back on**, but **knees to fall down on**. Our humanity is NOT a **sword to fall on**... but a **Savior to call on**. We are servants, of God and one another... working TOGETHER. You and I

are God's field, whom He ultimately plants and waters, with some help from us. You and I are God's building, a house for God's Spirit to dwell in... built not with human hands, but eternal in the heavens. As you and I encounter daily struggles because of our broken humanity, in closing I would lift up a few words from Joel... not the Biblical prophet, but the musical one, Billy. Some of you may be familiar with his song, "You're only Human":

It's not always easy to be living in this world of pain
You're gonna be **crashing into stone walls** again and again
It's alright... It's alright...
Sometimes that's what it takes, YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN.
You're allowed to make your share of mistakes
You better believe there will be times in your life
When you'll be feeling like a **stumbling fool**
So take it from me you'll **learn more** from your **accidents**
Than anything that you could ever learn at **school**
Don't forget your second wind; Sooner or later you'll get your second wind

But I survived all those long lonely days When it seemed I did not have a friend
'Cause **all I needed was a little faith** So I could catch my breath,
face the world again. **Don't forget your second wind**
Sooner or later you'll feel that momentum kick in.
Don't forget your second wind."

As followers of Christ, we are not immune to the struggles of this world. We will have a 'hard time' living in a 'world filled with pain.' Sometimes we feel like we're banging our heads up against stone walls. While Jesus gently whispers, 'it's alright... it's alright.' He knows we will make mistakes, sometimes acting like a 'stumbling fool'... as in, a 'fool for Christ.' But that we know that we learn most from the 'school of hard knocks.' And that even when it seems like others abandon us, we know that 'we have a friend in Jesus.' All we need is a 'little faith'... like a mustard seed... and sooner or later, our 'momentum' will 'kick in.' We simply must not 'forget our second wind.'

May that 'second wind' in truth be the 'inspirational' power of that mighty 'wind' of God's Holy Spirit. By that Spirit's power, may we 'humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord'... and, in the sight of those whom we love, and sometimes hurt. As we, in Micah's words, 'walk humbly with our God,' may we know that our friend Jesus is in truth walking with us to give us His peace. Even as He looks at us and smiles, compassionately saying, 'You're only human'...

Questions for Reflection

Today's readings speak of blessings and curses, life and death, good relationships and those that are broken. Moreover, the texts suggest that we have a choice in these matters.

Where do you find life, and where do you not—and what role do your choices play? Where have you experienced broken relationships in your own life or in the church? How do Christ and the reign of heaven enable us to move beyond brokenness and live in mutual support?