

Becoming human- giving glory_2018. 07 January 2018.

Becoming human- giving glory. Sunday 07 January_2018.

In Our Image: Genesis 1: 1-5 and 26 - 31

Our AIM for the beginning of this year will be for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human.

During the Christmas season when we looked at John's Gospel chapter one and also Matthew's Gospel chapter one we saw that both these writers took us not just to the earthly birth but rather to the ORIGINS or Genesis of Jesus – the Eternal Logos – before time itself. The primeval history (*) of the Book of Genesis in the Bible causes us to consider and hear the voice of Godhead saying: **Let US make humanity in our image – let us make male and female.** Chapters 1 – 11 (*) cover the mythic tale of the creation of the world including the creation and Fall of humanity from perfection. The OT tells the stories of the relationship of the so-called People of God with God and other peoples. Broadly speaking the NT introduces Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who challenges us with what it means to be truly human and about what essentially disfigures human beings.

We sit within history and culture in the beginning of the 21st century since Jesus Christ and as with every generation of humanity we question our own identity and purpose. We use many means to do that reflection – not just individual reflection and speculation but that of groups and communities – not just in friendship circles but also academic networks and various communities, including digital networks. Poetry, the arts including film and the sciences, theology and philosophy are all part of our thinking about what it means to be human.

Contemporary discovery programmes like “Blue Planet 2” make us aware of the wonder of the created order as well as the struggle of the planet to even continue. But also, various films depicting the lives of ordinary and real humans cause us to think about human behaviour as well. **EXAMPLE: -**

The Elephant Man is a 1982 American [historical drama film](#) about [Joseph Merrick](#) (whom the script calls John Merrick), a severely deformed man in late 19th century [London](#). The film was directed by [David Lynch](#) and stars [John Hurt](#), [Anthony Hopkins](#), [Anne Bancroft](#), [John Gielgud](#), [Wendy Hiller](#), [Michael Elphick](#), [Hannah Gordon](#) and [Freddie Jones](#). It was produced by [Jonathan Sanger](#) and [Mel Brooks](#), the latter of whom was intentionally left uncredited to avoid confusion from audiences who possibly would have expected a comedy.

The screenplay was adapted by Lynch, Christopher De Vore and [Eric Bergren](#) from [Frederick Treves's](#) *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (1923) and [Ashley Montagu's](#) *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* (1971). It was shot in [black-and-white](#) and featured make-up work by [Christopher Tucker](#).

SHOW:-

Clips: *The Elephant Man* – John Merrick (born just a few years before this church was formed). Railway Station scene chasing Merrick, “I am not an animal. I am a human being (1). SHOW:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCuqXLOVgFg>

[London Hospital](#) surgeon Frederick Treves finds John Merrick in a [Victorian freak show](#) in London's [East End](#), where he is kept by a Mr. Bytes. His head is kept hooded, and his "owner", who views him as [retarded](#), is paid by Treves to bring him to the hospital for exams. Treves presents Merrick to his colleagues and highlights his monstrous skull, which forces him to sleep with his head on his knees, since if he were to lie down, he would [asphyxiate](#). On Merrick's return he is beaten so badly by Bytes that he has to call Treves for medical help. Treves brings him back to the hospital.

Mr. Carr-Gomm, the hospital's Governor, is against housing Merrick, as the hospital does not accept "incurables". To prove that Merrick can make progress, Treves trains him to say a few conversational sentences. Carr-Gomm sees through this ruse, but as he is leaving, Merrick begins to recite the [23rd Psalm](#), and continues past the part of the Psalm that Treves taught him. Merrick tells the doctors that he knows how to read, and has memorized the 23rd Psalm because it is his favorite. Carr-Gomm permits him to stay, and Merrick spends his time practicing conversation with Treves and building a model of a cathedral he sees from his window.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_XznzJH2EY

He was born in Leicester in August 1862 and died in April 1890, aged 28. His remains are held in the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel. His parents were Mary and Joseph Merrick. (He is referred to as “John”).

Joseph Merrick's extreme physical deformities made him a sideshow attraction in life, and the fascinating subject of posthumous stage and film productions. Merrick has fascinated thousands including [Michael Jackson](#) who reportedly attempted to purchase the Elephant Man's bones from the Royal London Hospital, where he spent his later years.



We cannot and indeed should not assume that everyone has the same understanding of what it is to be human as you or I do.

(Human science studies the biological, social and cultural aspects of what it means to be human – and draws on history, philosophy, religion, genetics, sociology, psychology and so on.)

Our understanding of what it is to be human – our anthropology will help formulate our ideological beliefs and practices. Have we really thought about what lies behind our understanding of what it is to be truly human or do we simply repeat what our parents did without thought? Indeed, we can learn from the lessons of previous generations but as “followers of Jesu” we need to consider with new insight what it means:-

- to love God with ALL of our BEING and

- To love neighbour as we love ourself.

What does the Bible teach about this and what is the developed understanding and practice that we gain through Jesus the Christ? A growing understanding of our common humanity will birth a concern and compassion for one another which can lead to change in us and others. What are the beliefs about humanity in the world that we want to buy into and what are the ones that we want to reject. Our beliefs about the nature of humanness will help determine our beliefs and practices about things like end of life care, the child in the womb, issues of gifting and disability, the practices of justice and the prison system and so on.

Becoming human – giving glory. Earlier in the service we had a short reading from *Isaiah 9: 2-7*. Isaiah was written down about 8 centuries BC and prophesied the birth of a human child who would rule the people of God and be described as “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”, Isaiah said that Almighty God was determined to do this. Christians believe that this is truly God ***becoming human***. **Also for those who believe and receive Jesus as God with skin on – the only truly human being that following him is the means by which we become more truly human.**

Jean VARNIER in his book “Becoming Human” (DLT 1999 and reprinted at least 7 times since then argues...)

“Is this not the life understanding of us all – to become human? It can be a long and sometimes painful process. It involves a growth to freedom, an opening up of our hearts to others, no longer hiding behind masks or behind the walls of fear and prejudice. It means discovering our common humanity.”

(Jean Varnier lives in community with people with learning and intellectual difficulties. Born in 1928 to a life of privilege he became the founder of L’Arche (Noah’s Ark) now present in over 33 countries, with over 137 communities. He is philosopher, theologian and humanitarian).

Since this theme of ***Becoming human- giving glory*** is so expansive we are going to have to tackle it in bite size pieces and with God’s help and grace. Infact for many of us it is a life time commitment in this journey of becoming truly human and giving greater glory.