

Becoming human- giving glory. Sunday 14 January_2018.

In Our Image: John 1: 1 - 14

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.

V14 The Word (Logos) became a human being and full of grace and truth, lived among us. We have seen his glory...

During the Christmas season when we looked at John's Gospel chapter one and verse 14 (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 or Word – before time itself. God is described as becoming human – taking on flesh and blood (as the symbolic elements of bread and wine vividly remind us on our Communion Table today). The incorporeal God who is Spirit (*John 4: 24*) became Jesus. Jesus was NOT created a human being as he already existed – but God became flesh and blood while remaining God).

We ourselves 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. (* 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.)

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. BUT for us as Followers of Jesus and in the line of the Judeo-Christian tradition **we go to the Bible to seek** to isolate not just clues but revelations as to our identity and purpose.

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 Jesus 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.

The Bible teaches, and Jesus specifically embodies the truth that 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.

This also means that there are beliefs about humanity in the world that we want to buy into and that there are teachings and ideas 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.

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 – they will be like us and resemble us. TEV Genesis 1:26 – 31.** Chapters 1 – 11 (**) cover the mythic tale of the creation and population of the earth including the creation and Fall of humanity from “perfection”. The OT books tell the stories of the relationship of the so-called “People of God” with God and with other peoples. Broadly speaking the NT introduces Jesus of Nazareth, as the Messiah who challenges us with what it means to be truly human and about what essentially dis-figures human beings.

What can we say having heard this statement (Genesis 1: 26) and what is developed in the whole of the agreed (Canon) of Christian Scripture? This is a foundational and central belief of Christians (and other Abrahamic faiths) that men and women are like God and resemble God and therefore God is not totally other or totally foreign to human beings. Through thousands of generations Abrahamic faiths have held this as self-evident but also taught that human behaviour and choices have estranged us both from God and one another. Christians have argued that even after the Fall of human beings into doing evil as well as good that human beings still show something of the image and likeness of God (Genesis 9:6).

In this creation story God’s plan, God’s ideas come from **community and conversation.** Which tells us something essential about the tri-unity of Godhead.

Human beings also **created as a unity** – we cannot separate body, soul and spirit. We are seen as **an expression of the Eternal** – except God is incorporeal – Spirit as *John 4: 24* says. We are created in **God’s likeness but with bodily limitations** as well as bodily pleasures.

God grants human beings a **degree of choice and self-determination** (not robots simply obeying commands). We are created with the **ability to make moral and rational choices as well as to experience emotions.** There are many “trees to choose from in the garden”, but the warning is given by God **NOT to eat of the one tree that will give a knowledge of both good and evil.** It is this one command that we as humans repeatedly choose to disobey and so **DEATH becomes a part of our human experience.** The relationship between humans and God is distorted by this disobedience. (Our relationship with Death is one thing that we will consider this year as part of what it means to be fully human).

The relationship of humanity and the rest of the earth is also stressed and distorted. The consequence of being made in the image and likeness of God brought the responsibility

of “dominion” or power and stewardship over all creatures – a relationship we have exploited but not always for the good of all of the created order.

The image and likeness of God is expressed in the creation of both female and male human beings. This must in some way reflect masculinity and femininity in Godhead – while also a transcending of human gender. (In *Galatians 3: 28* we hear that **in the remaking of humanity in Jesus Christ** there is a restoring of gender equality as well as a transformation to racial and class equality – *there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free in Christ Jesus* was the cry of those being baptised.)

Humans as originally created **v31 are part of a “completed” and “good” creation.** Human beings are **BLESSED of God – showing ownership by God and purpose given by God. (Matter is not evil).**

It is this sense of ownership by God and state of blessedness that is restored and remade through the work of Jesus Christ. It is the story of the followers of Jesus that this is our experience – maybe not all the time but increasingly.

James 3: 9 describes all human beings as made in God’s likeness and therefore challenges us to treat all others with dignity and expectation.

The NT writers call us to **be renewed in the image of the One who created us –**

READ Ephesians 4: 23, 24 and 5:1. *Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created in God’s likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy....Since you are God’s children you must try to be like him.*

This transformation, this renewal of God’s image will not be completed until we meet and see God face to face: 1 John 3:2, 3 and 4: 12. *My dear friends we are now God’s children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.*

As we take the bread and wine today we remember our humanity – its brokenness.

But also, we remember that God became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ.

We also remember that we are to become more human, more like Jesus Christ through the work of God’s Spirit as we co-operate