

Becoming human – giving glory. 2018.

11 Feb 2018 Genesis 2:21- Gen 3:13 **What a shame.**

What it means to become truly human

Since the beginning of the year we have begun to look at what it means to be truly human. For us as individuals and as all of us together. To think about identity and purpose and what it might mean when the bible talks about *“let us make humanity in our own image.”* (Gen 1:11) Yet in so doing is not to assume that everyone has the same understanding of what it is to be human that you or I do. God is described in becoming human, taking on flesh and blood as we will be reminded later in the communion service. Yet Jesus was not created as a human being as he already existed, but God became flesh and blood while remaining God. Yet Jesus embodies, and the bible teaches, that growing in our understanding of our common humanity will deepen our compassion for one another and lead to change in both us and in others. We have been reminded that men and women are like God and resemble God. So, God therefore is not totally other or totally foreign to human beings. In the creation story God’s intention is rooted in community and conversation just as the tri-unity is expressed in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as “triune community in unity.”

Human beings are created as a unity of body soul and spirit as an expression of the eternal but with bodily limitations. As part of that reality is that to be human is also to be granted a degree of choice and self-determination, the ability to make moral and rational choices. The image and likeness of God is expressed in the creation too of both female and male human beings. This in some ways reflects both the masculinity and the femininity in the God head while also transcending human gender. We also hear that in the **re-making of humanity in Jesus** there is a restoring of gender equality and a transforming of the inequality found here and everywhere else in human relations- including race and class. This is to be renewed in the image of the One who created us, created in God’s likeness. For it is from the community and communication within the Godhead that humanity as both men and women are made. Jane drew our attention to *James 3:9* that means with this basic root of all human beings are made in God’s likeness it therefore challenges us to treat all others with dignity and respect.

Nonetheless, that is not all we share in common. We need to be renewed and remade in discovering what it means to be truly human as all, without exception fall short of God’s glory (*Romans 3:23*) having sinned and in not living in full obedience to God. Humanity is broken. Human behaviour and choices have estranged us both from God and from one another. Yet even after the Fall of human beings into doing evil there is still some capacity as well for echoes of good so that human beings still show something of the image and likeness of God (*Gen 8:9;6*).

Yet Genesis gives us a powerful explanation of the source of human disobedience, the presence of evil and God’s pronouncement on our fallen state. Not least in its consequences and outcomes where **death and mortality become part of the human condition** (despite medical sciences trying their best to delay and deter

it). The walking talking relationship with God was interrupted. And blame, shame and guilt enter into human consciousness. And enmity and hostility enter into social relations. Yet where God continues to ask probing questions to ponder the reality we create for ourselves. **It is Jesus who challenges us with what it means to be truly human and in what essentially disfigures human beings** where the consequences of death mean the walking talking relationship was interrupted.

Over the last two weeks we have been reflecting on fear and loneliness where humans hid from God and man and woman are estranged from one another. Here **loneliness is prevalent** throughout in societies but were the reasons for it are many and varied including break up, loss, and instability of relationships. This can lead to anger, resentment and where love cannot be given or received, and which can spread like a disease. *Mother Theresa* was quoted as saying ... *“there are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love..... it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There is a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”* Yet Christians too remain caught up in the human condition and can experience loneliness, experiencing separation and alienation but were Jesus comes to re-establish relationship with God and neighbour and the means to do that.

Communion is a reminder and a resource to do that. In fact, loneliness can drive us deeper into God and into meaningful relationship with other humans. It is something we have in common with others and as we too are on a journey of recognising loneliness and learning to love as God loves we become more truly human. It helps us develop a deeper responsibility for others and to value and include others in the common good. But it also makes us more reflective. It takes us into a deeper union with God and into a deeper personal integration and relation to others. The energy of loneliness can both quench our thirst and deepen our appetite for a deeper encounter with God and with that the possibility of change, newness and therefore hope as our *chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (shorter Scottish Catechism 1646/7)*

Jane asked the question last week about how we can use loneliness to grow as people both individually and in community. Where Jesus changed the lonely woman at the well of Sychar because he knew about her inner search for love and companionship. As *Augustine* noted *“you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until it rests in you.”* In the journey of discovery and the healing of meaning and identity is found in finding our way home with Jesus.

All human beings were created to know and enjoy God. Part of life is to change, grow and develop. That includes growing in love, openness, forgiveness, responsibility and in love of neighbour. Yet to do this is to do this in dialogue and belonging and seeking this together. Yet for this to happen we the need for an opportunity to do it which will inevitably need us to advance in insecurity, newness and a in a leaving of some form. To make choices where we need to know the truth about myself and ourselves and of God's love for me and for us. As we can do this we find both identity and meaning so that we can find the strength to live in the new, not the past.



What a shame

So, in continuing to look at **the human condition** after the Fall, and how it is to be truly remade through Jesus in embodying what it means to be human, we will think for a few minutes of the **place of shame as part of meaning and identity**. We will do this by looking at three verses in the account in Genesis we read at the beginning of the service

from **Gen 2:12 to 3:13**.

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end up by later looking at **Hebrews 12:2** and consider how this might help us as we move into a time of communion.

The three verses are Gen2 :25, *“The man and the woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed.”*

Genesis 3:7 *“As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding and realized that they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.”* and

Genesis 3:10 He answered, *“I heard you in the garden; I afraid and hid from you, because I was naked.”*

We see in the earlier creation story how in the naming of animals it simply highlights for Adam not his power but his deep loneliness. As we have said we are social beings made for fellowship. Adam does not really begin to live until he gives himself away (*Gen 2:24*) to another on his own level. A counterpart valued for herself alone before anything is said about child bearing. A true partnership, the very stuff of Adam yet a wholly new being. *“At last here is one of my own kind, bone taken from my bone and flesh from my flesh. Woman is her name because she is taken out of man.”* It is an exclusive joyful union where God’s true pattern is a relationship of perfect ease. Of perfect love without greed, distrust or dishonour where (v25) the man and woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed. They were not ashamed.

This is a poignant and pointed reminder of a vanished peace and harmony soon to define the human condition after the Fall and the consequences and ruination that come. Yet as Paul argues in his letter to the Romans this is not the last word on the matter but (Romans 5:19) “ *Just as all people were made sinners as a result of the disobedience of one man, in the same way they will be put right with God as a result of the obedience of one man.*” Where life will swallow up the death fruits of the consequences of the Fall.

It is to the Fall that we now turn and its account in Genesis 3. **The appeal to pride by the serpent carries with it no compulsion.** The serpent was not forcing Eve to do anything. Yet his word is flattering and disturbing. It is a mark both of the malevolence and the shrewdness of the serpent. “*Did God really tell you.?*” “*That’s not true ... God said that because he knows that when you eat of it you will be like God and know what is good and bad!*” It smuggles in the thought and suggestion that God’s word is subject to our judgment. The exaggeration by Eve, “*God told us not to eat of that tree or even to touch it* (that’s the exaggeration) *if we do, we will die.*” draws Eve in to the debate on the opponent’s terms. At that point it is the serpent’s word against that of the word of God and the serpent flatly rejects it. This is the first loss. The loss of human capacity to truly discern God’s true judgment and his wisdom. It opens it up for us to reinterpret life, develop new systems of thought. To redirect our ambition and affection to become like God and play the game of trying to outwit him. An intoxicating game of arrogance-presenting divine love as envy, service as servility, coexistence as competition, glory as shame, honour as dishonour. Instead of community and conversation replacing it with autonomy and an imagined sense of freedom. In making self-fulfilment the goal and the prospect of material, mental and physical beauty the object of life rather than the relationship with God based on faith.

The idea of the apple and the apple tree (as depicted in this famous image of Adam and Eve) and the eating of it, the offering of it, and then the receiving of it rests on a word play in the Latin. Malus for evil; Malam for apple. It is not in the bible. Nor is it indeed simply about sexuality and seduction but an ingratitude and rebellion against God’s provision by both Adam and Eve. As a pretension to independence rather than inter dependence and a disastrous misuse of privilege by both Adam and Eve. It replaces the lack of anxiety with fear. Of grace with greed. Of being without shame to being ashamed. Sexuality that initially brings both difference and distinction while instituting a tangible sense of being “with “rather than being alone is lost. Lost too is the sense of not just being simply “other “but interdependent. An identical essence of friendship and intimacy in humanity as co responder, in harmony and in difference. That is now all lost. Now instead of nakedness there is concealment. Instead of liberty, anxiety. Where before “*God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased* “(Gen 1:31) of **this work of man and woman without shame it has now introduced shame as with it sin has entered into the world.**

“*So, she took some of the fruit and ate it.*” Then Adam ate it. The serpents promise of eyes being opened was true in part, but it was a massive anti-climax to the promise of

enlightenment. **The familiar world was spoilt.** Projecting evil into innocence, reacting to the good with **shame and flight**. Losing innocence is like losing your health, you only get to really appreciate it when you lose it. Yet **the instinct to cover up** was sound and God confirms it in *Gen 3:21* “*The Lord God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife*” “as sins proper fruit is shame. A couple now ill at ease with one another and from God from whom they had both hidden. There is no going back. The door to Eden is forever closed. Innocence lost, by definition, cannot be regained - but **it can be redeemed.**

The verbs of taking and eating were **replaced by a different meal**, one we will celebrate shortly. Verbs that indicate life and rescue rather than poverty and death. In *Luke 22* Jesus invites his disciples and us to the new covenant meal. “*Then Jesus took a cup, gave thanks to God and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves””* Then he took a piece of bread and gave it to them saying “*This is my body, which is given for you.*”

Rescue from the fact that both men and women had been sold a false idea of evil, of wisdom as sophistication of greatness as greed. But also, of life. The promise of the gift that our bodies can be re-clothed with glory. “*While we live in this earthly tent we groan with the feeling of oppression, it is not that we want to get rid of our earthly body, but that what is mortal will be transformed by life.*” (2 Cor 5:1) **Adam and Eve chose fig leaves. We can choose Christ instead.**

In the confrontation that follows the incident of fruit eating God’s first question is “*where are you?*” as Adam and Eve hid. It was a gracious question as it intended to draw both of them out of hiding rather than driving them further into hiding. It is in *verse 10* that Adam’s answer reveals the shrinking away from God’s presence while trying to conceal that fact “*I was afraid and hid from you because I was naked.*” **Fear is introduced. Shame is introduced.** In playing the blame game onto his soul mate Eve, he puts a further obstacle on receiving mercy. He may be out of his hiding place in the trees but emotionally, mentally, spiritually his attitudes drive him deeper and further into his hiding places away from God and away from Eve and deeper into shame.

What shame?

Shame and honour are part of every cultural system. What disgusts us. What we despise. What we fear. What is dirt and needs to be excluded. But it is a part of us, so we conceal it. We hedge it around with silence. We punish it. We ostracise it. Yet we also lionise it. Transgress its boundaries, the thrill of breaking what we have created. We become complicit with it.



Jesus re-defines what true honour, true glory, openness and transparency really is. What it means to be truly human. Hebrews 12:2 *“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne.”*

This points to the reality that to die by crucifixion was to be placed in the lowest depths of shame and disgrace. A death reserved for those seen as unfit to live, who were sub human. So, degrading that Roman citizens were exempt. The crucified were often crucified naked. It was vile. It was a deterrent. It was for criminals. Yet Jesus disregarded it as not being worthy of being taken into account. His endurance on the cross puts him in his place of exaltation by God. He became our blame and our shame. He submitted himself to shame and death as **it was for his desire that we might have joy.** He says to his disciples in the upper room during the Last supper that *his joy may be in them so that their joy may be complete (John 15:11).* So, Jesus prayed in his high priestly prayer in *John 17:13* *“So that they might have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness.”* As human beings we begin to discover this where and when we look to Jesus in faith. A definite act of **looking away from shame and blame, fear and anxiety, greed and independence and looking to Jesus** who has become our shame and blame for us. To be reminded of the humanity of Jesus. Someone we know who can relate to our sufferings but is also the pioneer and finisher of our Christian life. A life of pilgrimage and journey, of someone that despised the shame, set it to one side to become our shame and blame for the joy set before him. For he had in view the finishing line, the joy that was set before Jesus and the joy he prayed that his disciples would receive. A joy that took precedence over everything else.

A joy that will need to be kept for another time to consider in our uncovering what it means to be truly human.