

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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HUMAN

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Text of the Sermon preached the 9th Sunday after Pentecost

July 25, 2021

II KINGS 4:42-44 | PSALM 145:10-19

EPHESIANS 3:14-21 | JOHN 6:1-21

St. Paul is praying for us: “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”

We are loved by Christ. We are adopted by the Spirit. We are named by the Father. Each one of us are unfailingly rooted in this

love that claims the whole human family. This is revolutionary. This is the fulfillment of the whole biblical story: “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name... I pray that you may comprehend.... I pray that you may be filled...” Thank you Paul.

Who can tell us what it means to be human? These days, in the modern era, we often think we have to balance two competing claims to an answer, a scientific and a spiritual one.

It may seem strange to say, but biologists and anthropologists are still arguing about what makes us human. Which Homo Sapiens were the first humans? The first fossils of Homo Sapiens are from 200,000 years ago, yet we share none of their genes. It takes only 4,000 years for a human group to assume each other’s genes, whipping out any trace of our ancestor’s genes. Were Neanderthals humans? Not exactly. Was the difference language? We await further discoveries.

A new group of population geneticists have taken this information and suggested that the only answer is a spiritual one. Whoever the first humans were, they were chosen when they realized they were different. *In media res*, means ‘in the middle’. Dante begins his *Divine Comedy* ‘in media res,’ in the half time of life. Even fairy tales begin ‘once upon a time. Somewhere, in the middle of the story of Homo Sapiens, a group looked up, looked down, looked at each other and said “we are human.”

And that means, after all, the answer to the question of what makes us human is necessarily a spiritual one, one that can only be communicated in a complete story that has a beginning, middle and end.

Except for the very first chapter, Genesis, chapter 1, the Bible is a story that begins in the middle of things. This is important. The actual story of the Bible begins in Genesis, chapter 2, in the middle of this competition between not quite humans, at the moment, according to the Holy Spirit, that God decides it is time to stamp the species Homo Sapiens with his image, and keep track of what happens next. The story of our being made in God’s image is not a genetic story, but a genealogical story.

At the right time, when it was time for us to remember how good the creation was meant to be, God fashions the creature Adam, removes him to a garden, and gives him the name ‘human.’ Adam, the human, is his name. Then he fashions Eve from Adam and declares that they both together bear the image of God.

The Bible’s bold claim is that Adam and Eve’s descendant’s are the first humans, not in a genetic sense, but in a genealogical sense, from a spiritual point of view.

Readers of Genesis know how preoccupied the writers are with genealogy. It is the story of how a family becomes a tribe and will eventually, liberated from great oppression, become a nation. Genealogy is not just the study of where we come from, but the knowledge of who has claimed us and who we can claim as our family.

Armed with the knowledge of the difference between our genetic inheritance and our genealogical inheritance, we may hear St. Paul’s prayer with new power. “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.” We are humans, not because of our genes, but because of who claims us. We are truly human when we acknowledge that God has called our families into being, as we claim our families one with God’s family by the power of water and the Spirit.

Each of us here finds ourselves in the middle of our story. Do we believe that God has made us for himself? Do we believe that our families, however imperfect, however we might struggle to feel like we belong, are called into being by God, given to us as the vehicle for our salvation? In baptism we belong to a greater family. Not leaving our own family, we are never stuck there, but based there reach out to grow our families, and become more a part of God’s universal family in new and surprising ways.

As Paul prayer for us: “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

To be filled with the fullness of God! How does that happen?

Jesus goes up the mountain at the time of the Passover. Jesus has compassion on the people who are like sheep without a shepherd. As at the first Passover, he sees peoples who may doubt they have a share in Israel's blessing, but more importantly, don't yet know they are part of the whole human family.

He enlists the ingenuity and resources at hand of his friends and feeds the 5,000. Or rather, he gives himself completely to them in answer to the Israel's question: can God set a table in the wilderness? Indeed. The grass is green here. Sit the people down. Will God provide? Even later on the storm tossed sea! Will Israel truly be a blessing to whole world? See how much is left over, for everyone.

In Jesus presence, in this communion, the answer is yes.

Jesus takes our gifts, blesses them, and then gives them, along with his whole self, back to us. He creatively, abundantly, fills us with his love. And there is more than enough for whomever will come, whomever is called to this table.

Today, let us not think of the Eucharist, this ritual we act out every Lord's Day as a sign, or a symbol, or even a mystery. This morning let us see the Eucharist as God's answer to Israel, the picture of what it means to be truly human in God's presence.

God declaring in a new Passover feast, that we make up the height and depths, the length and the breadth, of God's new humanity.

Every time we celebrate and receive the Eucharist, God adopts us anew into his plan and purpose.

Thank you for your prayers Paul. May we leave here today with such knowledge. May we be filled with all the fullness of God.