

Human Becoming

A sermon on John 1:1-18; Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-20 & Isaiah 9:2-7 by Nathan Nettleton, 24 December 2016

© LaughingBird.net

Message

Jesus is the Word – what God has to say – who reveals true humanity and illuminates our path to becoming fully and truly human.

Sermon

In the beginning

At the very start

before there was anything else

before there were stars or oceans or dinosaurs

before there were angels or shepherds or carols

there was already one who was truly human

the one who is called ‘the Word’.

The True Human was with God

and the True Human was God.

From day one

God and the True Human were inseparable

one and the same

like parent, like child

Truly God and truly human were the same thing.

It was through the True Human that everything was created

everything

Every rock and tree

every mountain and ocean

Every lizard and possum

every adult and child

every hope and dream

every passion and principle.

There is absolutely nothing that doesn’t owe its existence to him

Everything was created by the Word

or appeared as the offspring of something created by the Word

Everything traces its existence to the Word.

In the Word was life

all of life

life in all its fullness

life as it was created to be.

Life: passionate, irrepressible, exuberant;

life: generous, spirited, free.

True human life.

The True Human is the source of the life

that turns on the lights for everyone

the life that wakes us up

and reminds us what it is all about
the life that shakes us out of our apathy
and opens our eyes to what human being is all about
true human being that we are only haltingly becoming.

The light of his life breaks open the darkness
it gets through into the blackest hell holes
the places where darkness rules
under the boot of the tramping warrior
and garments rolled in blood.

The light of his life cuts through into the hardest hearts
it puts a ray of hope into the deepest pit of despair
it rekindles our memory of what true humanity can be.

And though this light is sometimes no more than a flicker
a vulnerable glimmer
threatened and tormented by the cold sneering darkness
yet still the darkness has never been able to snuff it out
not even in the darkest and most chilling hours
of barbarism and atrocity
of tramping warriors
and garments rolled in blood.

Even then the light still flickers bravely on
calling us to believe
to hope
to follow
to become truly human.

The Word was always in the world
but the world didn't even notice him
Though the world owed its existence to the Word
and though the Word was present in its every breath
the world was oblivious to him
and went about its self-destructive business
its power, its politics, its bloodshed
without any reference to the Word
to the True Human.

Despite dancing in our every joy
and weeping in our every tear
the Word couldn't catch our attention
couldn't get us to recognise the light
and follow it
to life in all its fullness.

The light flickered bravely on
but the people turned their backs
and lived in darkness.

And there was grief in the heart of God
Deep grief
Anguish and pain
“Oh my people, how can I bring you light and life?
How can I show you what you were created to be?
Truly human like me
How can my Word set you free?”

One day there was a blaze of light in a small house
A frightened girl fell to her knees
The messenger of the Lord said, “Do not be afraid
You are truly blessed. You have been chosen.
Chosen to bear the Word of the Lord
Chosen to bear the True Human.
Are you with us? Will you do this?
Will you give birth to the light of the world?”

Mystics from the Middle East saw it in the stars,
and travelled from afar on a hunch
and returned home with news of something truly human.

They wrote of it in the Qur'an, saying:
*“The angels said, ‘O Mary!
Allâh gives you news of a Word from Him
whose name will be the Messiah,
Jesus, son of Mary,
who will be held in honour in this world and the next...
He will speak to the people in his infancy
and in his adulthood.
He will be one of the righteous.’
Mary said, ‘My Lord, how can I have a child
when no man has touched me?’
The angel said, ‘This is how Allâh creates what He will.
When He has ordained something,
He only says “Be” and it is.’”* (Qur'an, Sura 3:45-47)

She couldn't begin to know what this would mean
But she said “Yes
Count me in
I am the servant of the Lord
Let me be what the Lord needs me to be.”

And so the True Human turned up on his own planet
among those he created
among those who were created to become truly human
but whose capacity to become human
had become so tangled and twisted and trampled
that it looked like a lost cause.

He turned up among his own people
among those created to be his sisters and brothers
truly human like him
but his own people turned their backs on him
Again
Still

Forever the stone that the builders rejected
There's no room in Rome, go to Israel
There's not room in Israel, go to Nazareth
There's not room in Nazareth, go to Bethlehem
There's no room in the inn
go out to the shed where the animals are
Out, out, out, out....
He turned up among his own people
but his own people shut him out.

The True Human was undeterred
This was no sudden whim
He was in for the long haul
He was born flesh and blood like everyone else.
He cast in his lot with us
and rolled out his swag in our midst.
There was no going back
no matter what it might cost
in flesh and blood
truly human flesh and blood.

We have seen him in all his glory
like parent, like child
warm and generous to a fault
solid and true to the core
So truly human that we barely recognised him
we, for whom true humanity was a fleeting memory
of a place we had never seen
we, for whom true humanness was a yearning
a barely imagined hope
that we barely dared speak of.

Some people accepted him though
and put their trust in who he said he was
and what he said he was on about
Some people came to see

Shepherds heard a song of peace from the angels
Shepherds whose only experience of peace
was the resentful peace
secured and enforced
by the tramping boots of Roman troops

But they heard the angels' song
and were drawn by the promise
of something more truly human
than anything Rome could comprehend.

They believed
And others came to believe
that this was the Word
that this was what true humanity looked like
that this was what God looked like
Truly human
that this was God and no other
that when God is unveiled
true humanity is seen.

The carol got it wrong
"Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see"
No!
Human flesh is no veil hiding an alien divinity
Our mistaken concepts of divinity are the veil
that hides God's true humanity

Vulnerable human flesh
laid in a feed trough
shut out by the world
that has forgotten what being human means
That's what God looks like
when the veil is pulled back.

Believe that, and everything changes
Believe that and you'll know that the real mistake
was thinking that we were already human
We are only potentially human
occasionally human
brokenly human
Believe that, and true humanity comes into view
onto the radar
suddenly imaginable
tantalisingly within reach
like a safe way suddenly remembered.

Just believe that God is this way and no other
that this truly human flesh laid in a manger
is God and no other
and the chains that bind us in darkness will be broken
the false gods will lose their veil of legitimacy
the oppressive laws that ground us into a rigid timid righteousness
will fall away
The earth will be shaken

and the doorway to truly human life
will swing open before us.

Some people accepted him
and put their trust in him
in true humanity
He gave to those people all they needed
to become children of God
to become truly human
Becoming God's children
had nothing to do with biological processes
with sperm and egg
or three-stage labour
We are God's children
because we are claimed by God
adopted by God
achingly loved by God
Our destiny as God's children is fulfilled
when we are born of God
when the chains fall away
and our true humanity emerges
We become all God's children can be
when we become as truly human as God.

No one has seen all of what God looks like
but that's no obstacle to getting to know God
No one has seen all of what God looks like
but the True Human
the one who is closest to God's heart
has shown us that God looks like
human life fully lived
fully lived with all the power and passion
and love and courage
that we were created for
This is what God looks like
like a courageous young mother saying yes
like a refugee child laid in a feed trough
like a man in a crown of thorns
standing up to the power of Rome
with the power of tenacious mercy
This is what God looks like
The one and only Son
the Word
the True Human
has put God within reach of us all.

Born flesh and blood like everyone else
he cast in his lot with us
and rolled out his swag in our midst

We have seen him in all his glory
 like parent, like child
warm and generous to a fault,
 solid and true to the core
so truly human
 that our failure to be human
 dismayed us and beckoned to us
 like an invitation to life
The call sounded out
 to the whole race of human *becomings*
True humanity awaits you
True humanity is your calling
 your destiny

How do we know that it's possible?
How do we know that God is for real about this?
Here tonight
 kneeling before a manger
we see how real God is about this
 how much God is invested in this
Here tonight
 kneeling before a manger
 we discover the truth about God
 and the truth about ourselves
And the truth is truly human
Human life in all its fullness
in all its possibility
in all its Godness

Come, Lord Jesus, come
Come, O Word of the living God
Come, True Human
Come
 be born in us tonight.