

February 4, 2024
The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Year B
Mark 1:29-39
Isaiah 40:30-31
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Being Human

Like many people right now, I am watching the new series about Jesus, The Chosen. It's been on my list of things to watch for a long time,

1. Because I like things about Jesus,
2. Because it was recommended to me by a pastor friend of mine,
3. Because I thought that it might be helpful to me in my work as a pastor, another way to help people enter into engagement with the gospels and with the person of Jesus,
4. Because it's turning into something of a cultural phenomenon, with its roots in my faith, so I should probably know something about it.

Finally, another friend encouraged me to watch it and I, after literally years of meaning to do it, actually started watching the series. But as I so often am, I am late to this party. Season four is about to come out, and I'm still watching season one. Actually, an argument could be made that I'm binge-watching season one because I'm trying to catch up with the first three seasons so that I'm ready to watch season four tomorrow night. So, over the course of the next 36 hours, if you wonder where I am, I'm probably watching The Chosen.

So far, and I'm not very far into it, I'm enjoying the series, but I'm not sure what I like about the series is what everyone else loves so much about it. I've heard people talk about how wonderful it is, the way it humanizes the people around Jesus, the people he meets and interacts with, the disciples, at the point where I am

in the series, new to being called, their families, Jesus' friends and even his opponents. But those people have lived in my imagination for decades, not only as saints, apostles, icons, but as people, living, breathing people who are, in their own ways, in their own time, a lot like us.

Honestly, the thing that I'm enjoying most about the series, is the way that it depicts Jesus' fascination with his own humanity, the need to eat, sleep, the pain of a minor injury. It makes me think more than I usually do about the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh. It makes me think about the miracle of God joining us in our humanity, setting aside the untouchable-ness of being God, to join us in the vulnerability of our human bodies, to join us in the dangers and the joys of being physical, of having physical needs, of being hungry and enjoying food, of being thirsty and having his thirst quenched by a cool cup of water, of being tired and needing rest, of feeling what a face feels like when it smiles, what a body feels like when it laughs, of feeling what it feels like when dirty feet are washed off after a day of work and walking, of feeling the sting of a cut and the pain and itch of healing.

So much of that humanity is there in the gospels, but you have to look harder to find it, have to imagine more to see it; to see tears running down Jesus' face at the tomb of Lazarus, to know that he sat down at tables with tax-collectors and sinners because he was hungry, not just because he was making a religious and political statement, to see him holding children in his arms, imagining his face in that moment. The Chosen helps us to imagine what is there, in and behind the gospels, the humanity of Jesus, and in that humanity, the nearness of God, God truly being with us, being one of us.

In today's gospel reading we find an example of Jesus' humanity and, in fact, one that might make us a little bit uncomfortable.

The gospel reading starts off well, with Jesus being exactly who we want Jesus to be and doing exactly the kind of thing that we want Jesus to do. He, who

has gathered some new friends, some new followers to him, Simon and Andrew and James and John, and when goes into Simon and Andrew's house, he sees the pressing concern in their lives, the illness of Simon's mother-in-law, and he ministers to her, and to them. He comes, and touches her, takes her by the hand and lifts her up. She is healed and can resume her own ministry, to him, to them, again taking her place in the household.

And then Jesus does more, of exactly what we would probably hope that Jesus would do. As the Sabbath day ended, Jesus gathered a crowd around him and ministered to the whole community, healing many and casting out demons. It's a lovely, hopeful picture, of the power of God set loose in the world to bring hope and healing to the brokenness of the world, entering our homes, our city streets, our families and bringing life.

I'm sure that all of us can get behind this picture of Jesus, can imagine ourselves being part of the crowd, bringing Jesus our own sickness or that of our loved ones and waiting with hope and patience for his gentle touch, for his word, "Be healed, be saved, be made well."

If only the gospel reading ended with that beautiful picture. But it doesn't. Instead, it ends the next morning. At some point that night, and we don't know how late it was, the crowds had to disperse. People went back to their homes, many healed, others probably hoping that Jesus would attend to them the next morning. Jesus probably went back into Simon and Andrew's house and got some sleep, but early the next morning he got up and went to a deserted place to pray.

And this is where we see something about Jesus that the previous scene didn't show us. We see his humanity. We see what the night of healing, what the crowds, what the confrontation with the demons, took out of him. We see how he needed time alone, time to himself, time to recharge, time to pray, time with God, to reaffirm and refocus his mission, his ministry. And we also see the words of the

prophet, Isaiah, words that are part of **gospel** reading for today made known in Jesus' life.

Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Jesus, in his humanity, needed to wait for the Lord, to have his strength renewed, to have his weariness assuaged, to have his power, his capacity for the ministry and the mission to which he was called restored, so that he could run and not be weary, so that he could walk and not faint, so that he could keep going.

But when his time of prayer was interrupted, when Simon and Andrew and James and John found him, he didn't do what they wanted him to do, expected him to do. They expected him to go back to Capernaum, to continue the healing ministry he had started the night before, to continue meeting the needs of their community. But that's not what Jesus did.

Instead, he moved on. He told his disciples that there were others who needed him and needed the message that he had come to share, the good news that the kingdom of God had come near. He told them, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." (Mark 1:38)

Then he left Capernaum and his disciples followed him. And in each place, he went Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God and Jesus healed and cast out demons. But what he never did was stay. He never stayed in any one place for too long. No matter how much people wanted him to, not because he didn't

care about the people in that place, not because he didn't have compassion for their needs, not because he didn't look at them and love, them, but because he was human, and there were so many that he needed to minister too, to share the good news with, to comfort, to heal, to challenge. And also, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

But mostly Jesus didn't stay because he knew that someday he would be back. He knew he would be back in the Spirit driven people, his followers, his apostles, his ministers, who would carry his ministry, his power, in his name, back to their towns and villages and homes, human beings who too, would need to eat and drink, who would laugh and cry, who would need to pray and rest, but who also would preach and teach and heal and comfort in his name.

And friends, in our humanity, in our needs, and in our exhaustion and with our talents, our joys and our sorrows, we are called to that work. We are called to the mission of Jesus, to live and to tell that the kingdom of God has drawn near. We are spirit filled for that work. And the gift that was given to Jesus, in his time of prayer and communion with his Father, is given to us, for the work that God has called us together to do, to be Jesus' hands and feet, and love and healing in the world:

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they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
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Thanks be to God. Amen.