

“The True Human Being”

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Isaiah 50:4-10

Mark 8:27-38

*‘For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.’*

Isaiah 50:7

Let us pray... O God,

May we not behave in ways that are

‘pre-human, in-human, sub-human, anti-human, even sub-animal.’

Instead, help us to become more human.

Amen

Frederick Franck wrote a book called A Little Compendium on That Which Matters
which is a collection of brief meditations on – well, things that matter,

He states beautifully that:

‘A consensus between the religious traditions
on the nature of the Transcendent/Immanent is,
of course, unattainable. Nor is it indispensable.

There is a remarkable convergence
in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Sufism [which is a form of Islam]
on the criteria of what deserves to be called “Human”
and what is pre-human, in-human, sub-human, anti-human,
even sub-animal.’

It is a wonderful insight by a man who worked with Albert Schweitzer in Africa
as a dentist and who was the only artist invited to Vatican II.

Claiming no religious affiliation, his art and writings demonstrate

a great respect for Christian and Buddhist spirituality –

frequently using a theme of the human face as a symbol
for what he called the ‘Specifically Human’ as well as the ‘Cosmic Christ’;
and he led classes teaching people how to draw as a way of seeing.

He also took the town dump in Warwick, NY and had an auditorium built there
called *Pacem in Terris* – which means ‘Peace on Earth’;

and this is for classical concerts held there throughout the summer.

Frederick Franck has since passed away and

his son, Lukas, still manages the auditorium and sculpture garden.

I was hoping to meet Lukas on my trip this summer,

but the opportunity did not work out.

Someday though, I look forward to visiting Lukas Franck and *Pacem in Terris*
to learn more about his father’s work.

Willard, p.2

On this *day after* September 11th of *this* year,

we are reminded of the terrible events of that day 14 years ago and
the ongoing violence that has precipitated since then.

One of the lessons of 9/11 – that we should have learned as a world,
is that it is not possible to love God without loving people;
and heartbreak makes us human.

Last week, I told the stories from the Gospels of Luke & John
about Mary Magdalene and I included the narrative
about raising Lazarus from death.

Lazarus was a friend of Jesus and the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany;
and when his sisters sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was dying,
Jesus waited two days before going there.

When he arrived at Bethany, Lazarus was already dead and buried.

Each sister came to him and said this:

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Replying to Martha – who is matter of fact in her words and deeds,

Jesus just responds to her in a matter of fact way,
that he is here to raise people up from death.

He is unwaveringly focused on his mission –

as the Suffering Servant of the Isaiah passage,
whose face is set with determination like a sharp-edged flint.

However, when Mary speaks to him, Jesus is visibly moved – and weeps with grief
upon seeing the effect Lazarus’ death has had upon people Jesus cared about.

Jesus’ heart was broken and he became truly human as a result –
bearing the cross we bear of being human.

Our Gospel lesson today tells about the Apostle Peter who is at first,
praised for his insight like a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit
to whom Jesus is revealed as the Messiah;

But then, Peter is condemned for tempting Jesus to play it safe
like a traitorous ‘Satan’.

Eventually, Peter’s heart would be broken by the events of Jesus’ arrest
and Crucifixion, and the courage that was born in him
would give him the strength to take a stand against Roman persecution
and bear his cross.

Peter is a kind of ‘Everyman’ who is like ‘Everyone’ –

like *any one of us*, with the contradictions of our potential for good or bad.

Willard, p. 3

In recent weeks, I have preached about the dualities of our human condition:
true holiness in contrast with an obsession for perfection,
accurate perspective versus prejudice; humility versus ferocity.
We are a mixture of saintliness and sinfulness.

Jesus balances his Divinity and Humanity as an example to be followed –
he is a ‘parable’ himself for us as the True Human Being we can be.

At the Chautauqua Institution, each week is filled with all sorts of cultural events –
fine arts performances, political science lectures, educational classes,
as well as religious services.

I attended Week 8 which had the theme of “The Middle East: Now and Next”,
but I was surprised that the first big cultural presentation
was a production of “Carmina Burana”,
a satire of the Christian church that promoted a kind of hedonism –
and was a favorite of the Nazis when it opened in the 1930s.

The program included a full orchestra, choirs, dancers, overhead visual graphics,
medieval musicians, and even some lustful monks.

It was a huge program with perhaps a hundred and fifty performers.

In contrast with this event, was Carol Burnett’s program at the end of the week
which featured film clips of her TV show, and just her telling anecdotes
and answering questions from the audience.

She did limit her stories to her career –
mentioning her husband and family only briefly.

Over 5,000 people were in attendance that evening and we were all treated
to the generous and humorous humanity of Carol Burnett.

Just last week right here at The Villages’ Sharon Theatre,
Johanna & I went to see “A Twist of Lemmon” featuring
Chris Lemmon’s monologue about his father, Jack Lemmon.

It was a remarkable tribute to this talented and dynamic entertainer,
who was also troubled by alcoholism and a broken marriage.

It was a story of redemption and forgiveness that was truly
a masterwork of love by Jack Lemmon’s son, Chris.

The performing arts can be where we showcase and explore our humanity –
the good and the bad.

Church is that place, too, and the story-line we have received tells us
that God created the world and all that there is in it – including humankind,
we came from God and we will go home to God.

We are not perfect, but God came to earth to show us how to perfect ourselves
as true human beings.

Other religions have their role to play in teaching what it means to be human
and teaching the difference from what is less than human behavior.

Willard, p.4

Sometimes as Christians, we get caught up in overemphasizing judgment rather than forgiveness.

As Christians, we can learn and teach that there is no shame in the continual work to perfect ourselves to become the true human being we can be like Christ with God's help.

We can learn to accept ourselves as is – the cross we bear, and, with help from above – that is, from God, learn to choose the good.

Though Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others may use different words and traditions, the goal is the same – like that old folk song that goes like this:

1. *We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.*

Refrain

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

2. *We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.*
3. *We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.*
4. *All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,
And all praise to Christ Jesus, his only Son,
And all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one.*

<http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/578>

Amen

*Our first scripture lesson today is Isaiah 50:4-10
which comes from the Revised Standard Version.
This is an example of one of the Songs of the Servant –
the Suffering Servant, which Christians have traditionally
believed to be a prophecy about Christ...*

- 4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.
Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
- 5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious,
I turned not backward.
- 6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I hid not my face from shame and spitting.
- 7 For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
- 8 he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.
- 9 Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.
- 10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant,
who walks in darkness and has no light,
yet trusts in the name of the LORD and relies upon his God?

Let us be guided and challenged by these words...

Mark 8:27-38

27 And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesare'a Philippi;
and on the way he asked his disciples,
"Who do [people] say that I am?"

28 And they told him,
"John the Baptist; and others say, Eli'jah;
and others one of the prophets."

29 And he asked them,
"But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered him,
"You are the Christ."

30 And he charged them to tell no one about him.

31 And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things,
and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes,
and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 And he said this plainly.

And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said,
"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

34 And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them,
"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself
and take up his cross and follow me.

35 For whoever would save his life will lose it;
and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

36 For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

37 For what can a man give in return for his life?

38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words
in this adulterous and sinful generation,
of him will the Son of man also be ashamed,
when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."