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Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

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Third Sunday in Lent

What does it mean to be human?

Some might say it's falling in love and experiencing butterflies in your stomach. Others might say it's the disappointment of failure or the grief of losing someone you love. Now, a kid on the other hand might say it's the pain of a skinned knee, the thrill of a rollercoaster or taste of ice cream.

Others of us might point to scars on our bodies and remember the day it happened. Or we might point to the invisible scars of our hearts and reflect on how we have grown. How we define being human is often told through the wide range of emotions and events that shape our lives – the good and the bad, the shout-it-from-the-rooftop-moments and the sweep-it-under-the-rug-moments.

Each Thursday during Lent, a group of folks...some from Grace, some from other churches, gather for our Lenten Lunch series. And this past week, I asked them this very question...what does it mean to be human. Everyone was a bit guarded at first – giving text book appropriate answers. There was a sense that each person wanted to get it right without disclosing too much of themselves. Because we typically want to look like we have it all together because it's hard to say that being human may mean living through a divorce, battling an illness or helping a child through an addiction. Because when we acknowledge those difficult parts of being human, it makes us vulnerable to judgement and feeling like we don't quite measure up. And, so the group stepped lightly on this question at first.

But then I asked another question...how did Jesus experience being human? What emotions and events did he move through in his lifetime? The answers started to pour out. Things like, he felt deep grief and sadness over the death of his friend, Lazarus. He was compassionate to those who were suffering and outcast by society. He hung out with children and celebrated at weddings. He disobeyed his parents. He doubted God. He felt pain.

In fact, when we start to list all of the ways Jesus lived a very human life, we quickly realize that it looks much like our own. And from our Gospel this week we can add one more experience to the list...we know that Jesus got angry. For context, let me give you a little historical background.

In the other three Gospels, the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple comes after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and becomes a catalyst for the rationale to crucify him. He was becoming a threat to the religious and political order and accusing the money changers of cheating the poor and accusing Temple leaders of corruption. The tension in those Gospel tellings is between

the worldly order and God's order. We get the sense that the narrative is about law. However, in John Jesus' outburst at the Temple is placed at the beginning of the Gospel right after Jesus has turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana. It's very different sequence of events and scholars think that sequence has an important message for us to discern.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is coming in to remind people that all of the external things have no power over them, that all of these bells and whistles are only distractions from the real love and redemption that has been promised to them through the love of God. No more sacrifices to stand in their way, no more money, no more protocol. Just love. The story here isn't about corruption, it's about grace.

Because what Jesus did in that moment was to make a bold statement about humanity and all of the things that stand between us and our ability to know and feel God's love. He looked around at the way people were living and the barriers that had been placed between the people and God. And said No More.

I have to admit, I like that he did this through his anger. From an otherwise undesirable emotion came the gift of redemption. And we all know something about those undesirable parts of ourselves.

During Lent, we begin each Sunday by stating the 10 commandments together. Acknowledging God's desire for us and at the same time acknowledging our brokenness. We acknowledge that our lives don't always go as planned and that we make mistakes. And yet, we pray Lord have mercy. We recognize that we fall short of God's will for us and still we pray, Lord have mercy. We claim that we have sinned and we ask forgiveness. Lent begins here with the acknowledgement that we have all fallen short and that we are desperately in need of God's love and grace. And we are reminded of those overturned tables.

And so, as our Lenten group listed all of the ways Jesus shared our human traits, we reflected on those familiar words from the first chapter of John "the Word made flesh". And as we dug in, we realized something extremely important. And maybe this is obvious to you but I think it's often glossed over because this phrase "the word made flesh" has become such a well-worn part of our Christian vocabulary. So to make sure we get the significance of this statement, let's have a little scripture refresher.

John 1:1 reads "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." And then in John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." And we know from Genesis that when God spoke, things happened. Let there be light and there was light. *God's word is powerful.*

And from John 3:16 we know that God so loved the world that he gave his only son. *God's word is love.*

And through that power and that love, God's Word brought forth the fullness of humanity that we see so profoundly in Jesus' life. It was an experience that God created and understood. It is an experience that God still understands with each and every one of us.

One person in our group said she was moved by the thought that as God spoke, Christ came into being. That as the word became flesh, God gave purpose and meaning to Jesus. And then she said something so beautiful...she said, "I began to wonder what God's word was when God created me."

Think about the power of that statement. We are each God's Word. We were each created with meaning and purpose....And...What difference does that make for us? It makes a difference because we were created with love even though our lives aren't always pretty. We were created with love even when we fail and struggle and doubt. It easy to name what being human is all about when things go well and we are successful and make good choices. It's just so much harder when we don't want to look in the mirror.

But the Good News is that God created us just as we are and loves us for who we are. God created the human experience and allowed it to flourish in the life and example of Jesus. And even when we fall short, we pray Lord have mercy. And we are met with the assurance that all we are is met with one thing and one thing only – God's redemption grace. We are after all, God's Word.

Thanks be to God. Amen.