

BEING FULLY HUMAN

Psalm 139: 1-6; 13-16

I am about to share a revelation with you. What I am going to share is quite profound and perhaps to some will even be shocking. I am a human being. But wait, there is more! You too, are a human being! That's right! We are all human beings. God made us human beings! And in Genesis it is recorded that God said of His human creation, "*It is very good!*" So I ask, why then does so much of the Christian community embrace a belief that there is something wrong with being human?

Yes, it is true that Paul identifies followers of Christ as a new creation—that the old has passed away and that the new has come.¹ But friends, that does not mean that in Christ we are no longer human. What it does mean is that in Christ we can be more healthy and whole in our humanness. What it does mean is that in Christ we can better understand how to be fully human as God created us to be.

And friends, whether we like it or not being fully human means that sometimes there will be mistakes and misdeeds. Being fully human in Christ is not about arriving at some place of perfection; it is about staying on the spiritual journey of discovery and growth as long as we have any breathe left in us. I will even put it this way. The more fully human that I become, which is what God created me to be, the more meaningful my relationship with God becomes. For you see, being fully human means being in touch with my spiritual nature which is the hub of my humanness.

As we attempt to give our scriptural text, the Psalmists sacred words of respect for God's human creation, and our theme of being fully human a practical contemporary framework of understanding we are going to be utilizing Barbara Brown Taylor's book *Leaving Church: a memoir of faith*. Peter Gomes, Harvard University Chaplain, a black gay man, and author of *The Good Book*, writes of *Leaving Church*, "*How fortunate we are that Barbara Brown Taylor is here to remind us that 'the call to serve God is first and last the call to be fully human.'*"

Brown is an Episcopal priest who no longer serves in the church. Yet, she writes, "*I may have left the house, but I have not left the relationship.*" *Leaving Church* is the account of her spiritual/faith journey—her journey at being fully human. In *Leaving Church* she describes how her journey led her from being Parrish priest to University professor of religious studies. *Leaving Church* is about becoming fully human.

There are many reasons why Brown felt it necessary for her spiritual, mental, and physical survival to make her career change—to leave church. Many of her reasons are the same reasons that 1,500 men and women leave professional ministry every year. The difference is how truthful she is about it, how she accepts responsibility for it, and how she has used her experience to enhance her spirituality by finally giving up the impossible self-imposed expectation of being perfect and of meeting everyone's needs instead of being fully human—just being herself.

Brown writes, “*My dedication to **being good** had cost me a fortune in **being whole**. My desire to do all things well had kept me from doing the one thing within my power to do, which was **to discover** what it means to be **fully human**.*”²

A part of being fully human means being more concerned with the journey than with the arrival. It means embracing our failures as well as our successes. It means being less certain and more inquisitive—especially in matters of faith and religion.

After leaving Parrish ministry Brown discovered that, “*...being ordained is not about serving God perfectly but about serving God visibly, allowing other people to learn whatever they can from watching you rise and fall.*”³ Truth be known my friends, I have learned more from my wounds, my failures, my falls than from all of my successes combined.

My friends, Brown’s story reminds me that it is the human Jesus that I can identify with not the divine Jesus. It is the human Jesus who needed a drink of water that I can identify with. It is the human Jesus who became angry and threw things that I can identify with. It is the human Jesus who grew tired and needed to withdraw from his followers that I can identify with. It is the human Jesus who cried when his friend died that I can identify with. It is the human Jesus who honestly and prayerfully shouted while dying, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,*” that I can identify with. Jesus knew what it was to be fully human.

Brown writes that she had thought that being faithful to God, being a true servant of God, being a “real” Christian meant becoming someone or something other than who she was—that just being herself was not good enough; which unfortunately much of Christian religion teaches. When Brown discovered that she failed at becoming something or someone else other than who God created her to be she wonder, “*...if my human wholeness might be more useful to God than my exhausting goodness.*”⁴

Listen as I read (pages 229-230) how Brown relates being fully human with her belief and faith in Jesus the Christ.

Committing myself to the task of becoming fully human is saving my life now. This is not the same as the job of being human, which came with my birth certificate. To become fully human is something extra, a conscious choice that not everyone makes. Based on my limited wisdom and experience, there is more than one way to do this. If I were a Buddhist, I might do it by taking the bodhisattva vow, and if I were a Jew, I might do it by following the Torah. Because I am a Christian, I do it by imitating Christ, although I will be the first to admit that I want to stop about a day short of following him all the way.

In Luke’s gospel, there comes a point when he turns around and says to the large crowd of those trailing after him, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (14:26). Make of that what you will, but I think it was his way of telling them to go home. He did not need people to go to Jerusalem to die with him. He needed people to go back where they came from and live the kinds of lives that he had risked his own life to show them: lives of resisting the powers of death, of standing up

for the little and the least, of turning cheeks and washing feet, of praying for enemies and loving the unlovable. That would be plenty hard enough for most of them.

If he could not shake the crowd off, they were all oing to get themselves killed, or worse. They were going to venerate his path in place of finding their own. They were going to expect him to tell them things they could only discover for themselves. So he turned around and said something guaranteed to discourage most of them from going any further. He stopped the car so the spiritual hitchhikers could get out. Like me, a lot of them decided that they did not have what it took to be disciples after all. Drifting away in clumps of two or three, they eventually found their ways back home, where they started local chapters of the Friends of the Disciples, and to everyone's great surprise that turned out to be enough. All these years later, there are still a few who believe that becoming fully human is the highest honor they can pay to the incarnate one who showed them how.

My friends, the way to be fully human is to see and understand Jesus not as the founder of a new religion but as a living example of being fully human. Become that new creation that Paul writes about by becoming fully human as did Jesus.

¹ II Corinthians 5:17

² Leaving Church, page 127.

³ Ibid, page 37.

⁴ Ibid, page 219.