

“JESUS: I – THE MAN”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
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1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:15-3:21

Matthew 4:1-11

A couple of weeks ago, I was sitting with Damien, who most of you know is my great nephew, and I asked him how confirmation class was going. He, along with a number of other youth, are preparing for their confirmation under the leadership of Sandy Wherry and Eric Laramore. Well, Damien told me, they were studying creeds that day, and they had actually been given some homework, which was to write their own creed – their own statement of beliefs.

As we talked, I thought about all of the different creeds that are included in our hymnal. Of course, the one we know best and say the most is the Apostles’ Creed. We say it every time we baptize anyone, we say it when new members join – we know it by heart.

But there are others. One of my favorites is number 883, which is actually from the United Church of Canada. It’s one of my favorites because of the very last lines which go like this: “In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.”

Other denominations, particularly the Catholics and Episcopalians, say the Nicene Creed regularly (which, frankly, always astonishes me) because it’s quite lengthy and they say it by heart. But in the middle of that creed, is a line on which I want to focus this morning, and the line is about Jesus, and it goes like this: “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human.”

That’s it, right there! “He became truly human.” That’s what I want to talk about this morning, as we begin this Lenten series of sermons on Jesus and how He was revealed to us. Today, we begin with Jesus, the man. Jesus, truly human.

I don’t know how much we actually think about that. Oh, we totally understand Jesus as fully and truly divine. John says it so beautifully, “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We worship the divine Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, worker of miracles, healer of the sick, the One who died for our sins, and rose victorious from death, and sits at the right hand of the Father. That is the fully and truly divine Jesus.

But today I want to invite us to think about the truly human Jesus. How is it that he was truly human and why was it necessary? Well, look back at our history, from the beginning – in the Garden of Eden. From the beginning, God loved us with an overwhelming love. Actually, He loved so much that He set in place this beautiful, perfect world. He gave us everything we needed, and said to our forefather and foremother Adam and Eve – “This is all for you. You have everything you need. It is all beautiful, and you will never be in want. Enjoy it, all of it, except for one thing, one particular tree.”

And, you know the rest of the story, it was to that particular tree that Adam and Eve went, and ate of its fruit, and the rest, as they say, is history. That was the first incident of humanity turning its back on God, and the story just kept going. Over and over again, God loved us, and over and over again, humanity turned the other way – because of selfishness, self-centeredness, greed, so many reasons. No matter what God did – parted the Red Sea to let His people pass safely, granted Abraham children long after his wife should have been able to have children – well, the list goes on and on – no matter what God did – humanity continually turned away. We just didn’t get it.

So God said, “I will become as one of them, then they will understand the depth of my love for them.” And He sent Jesus as one of us – fully human yet fully divine.

Jesus – the man – born to a human mother just like all of us. Jesus – the man – whose earthly father stood by his wife’s side and watched her labor to give birth – just like so many men, including many of you, have done.

Jesus – the man – who was just like all of us as we struggled to learn to walk, first wobbling on our feet, and falling repeatedly, before we found our legs and never stopped! Jesus – the man – who was a child, just like us – discovering the wonder of learning the alphabet and putting words together into sentences, and loving to read.

Jesus – the man – who was a youth just like us – who no doubt had the same struggles of trying to figure out who He was just like we did, wanting to be liked by the other kids, finding His place in the world, testing the boundaries. We know He did **that** from the account of when his parents lost him on a trip – He had stayed behind.

Jesus – the man – who knew and experienced the same emotions we have. .

Thanks be to God that Jesus knew much of the joy that comes in our human experience. There is no doubt that He knew the joy of being part of a family. He was dearly loved by his parents, and scripture says that he had siblings, so he knew that joy as well. He was able to travel with his family, which is always a good time. And later on, He knew the joy of friendship and companionship with His disciples and others; He knew the joy of seeing lives healed and made whole, of lives

changed. He knew the joy of seeing people come to know God His Father and trust in His love. Jesus – the man – knew great joy. Thanks be to God!

But He also knew the struggles humans face. We don't know when, but we know He lost His earthly father, Joseph, and that caused Him pain. We know He lost friends to death, and we hear in scripture how He wept over that. He knew the pain of being shunned by others, of being ridiculed and questioned, of being misunderstood, of being on the outside looking in. He knew the pain of being under constant pressure.

And today, the Gospel lesson tells us, Jesus – the man – knew the struggle of temptation, just like everyone of us does. Over the course of His life, Jesus was tempted many times, but today, the temptation comes in the desert, not long after His baptism in the Jordan.

His baptism was a spiritual high moment in His life. When He came up out of the waters of the Jordan, the heavens opened up and He (and others present) hear the voice of God, saying, "This is my beloved Son. With Him I am well pleased!" What a moment, and what strength that must have given Jesus as He turned to face a future that would be tough.

And then He walked into the desert and stayed there in prayer and fasting for forty days and forty nights. Forty days and forty nights of prayer and fasting will wear anybody down, and that's when the devil struck Jesus (which, by the way, is when the devil always strikes, when we're most vulnerable).

Anyway, here comes the devil, sauntering up to Jesus to challenge Him. "Okay Jesus, you've got to be starving by now. If you are who you say you are, change these stones into bread, and then you'll have something to eat. Go on Jesus, let's see you do it!"

That wasn't bad enough, because He came at Him a second time as well. "Okay Jesus, let's see if you really are who you say you are, let's see if your God really will save you. Throw yourself down from this high pinnacle, let's just see if your God will rescue you."

And a third time – the devil comes at Him. "Look Jesus, look at all the kingdoms of the world – they can all be yours – all you have to do is worship me, serve me – all of this can be yours!"

Three times the devil hits Jesus when He is most vulnerable. He appeals to his hunger, He appeals to His weariness and weakness in the hope that He'll turn away from God; and He appeals to His vanity, in the hope that He'll succumb to the desire for power for Himself. Three times the devil hits Jesus, and every time, it would have been so easy for Jesus to say "yes," but He didn't. Every single time, Jesus came back at the devil with scripture. He had the scriptures He needed to fight the battle with evil in His back pocket, and He fought the devil and won. The

scripture says that the devil left Him, and suddenly angels came and waited upon Him.

This was Jesus, the man, fighting temptation, just the same as we have to do. If it had been Jesus, fully divine only, we would understand how He fought the devil so successfully. But Jesus, fully human, it was much more of a challenge, because all of us know how tough it is to fight temptation.

Oh sure, we make light of it a lot of the time – you know, “the devil made me do it,” kind of talk! And sometimes the temptations we face seem funny or even trivial, and we laugh about it – “Oh, that brownie was talking to me!” or “I wasn’t really gossiping, I was just passing on information!”

But truth be told, we all know that facing temptation is one of the biggest spiritual battles we fight. Don’t believe me? Take a look at what’s in the news these days. Corporate executives being found guilty of fraud and mishandling funds – what is that but the temptation to have more, and take what isn’t yours to have? Kids bullying each other – what is that but the temptation to make yourself look better by belittling someone else. And I could spend an entire sermon talking about infidelity and adultery – what is that but yielding to the temptation to have whatever you want whenever you want it.

Many people are tempted at this time of the year to fib on their taxes – oh, probably not big lies, but little ones that no one will notice. Kids are tempted to cheat at school. All of us are tempted by things that are not good for us – whether that is too much food, or cigarettes, or alcohol, or drugs, or accumulating stuff that we don’t need, or gaining more power or influence. All of us know that temptation is a daily struggle of human life.

Which is why this scripture passage this morning is so critically important for all of us – because it reminds us that we are not alone in the struggle. Jesus – our Lord and Savior, Jesus, truly human and truly divine, has walked where we walk, and knows what it’s like to be tempted. And most important of all, He is willing to walk with us and be our partner in the fight not to succumb to it.

So if you’re deeply hungry, as He was in the desert, if there’s a hunger in your life and you’re tempted to fill it with food or drugs or alcohol or an affair or the easy way out of a situation – turn to Him who has known temptation – and ask Him to walk you through it and help you to say “No!”

And if life is hard for you right now and things aren’t going well, and you’re tempted to question God, turn to Him who had that temptation thrown in His face – and ask Him to walk you through it and help you to say “Through it all, still I trust you, O God.”

And if you’re tempted by ego, if you’re tempted to power or influence, turn to Him who faced that same temptation when the devil said He could have it all – and

invite Him to walk you through it, that you might be secure in the knowledge that you have enough, you are good enough just as you are, just as God made you.

My friends, the Good News of the Gospel is that we have a Savior who was truly human as well as truly divine. He walked where we walk, He knew the joys we know, He knew the sorrows and struggles we face, and He knew what it was like to face temptation. That means, there is nothing that we face that He has not faced, and He is here to walk with us through it all. Or as it says in the words of that creed I love so much – “In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone. Thanks be to God!”

So my friends, may you continue to walk on this journey through Lent, secure in the knowledge that whatever life brings – good, bad, joy, sorrow, and especially temptation – we are not alone. Jesus, fully divine, and fully human – walks with us, and will give us what we need every step of the way. May we turn to Him therefore in faithfulness and trust all the days of our lives. Amen.