

ON THE BEACH

Breakfast on the Beach.

Today I thought we would start with a little theology. Actually, I hope this whole talk is theology but I think you'll see what I mean. Throughout the history of the Christian faith there has been a struggle to correctly understand who God is, who Jesus is, and what is true about them. So, every now and then wrong beliefs crop up, we often call them heresies. Heresies are beliefs about God that are not supported by the truth of the Bible. As you can imagine there have been many arguments about what makes up correct beliefs in the Christian faith.

One of the earliest heresies is called Docetism. In a nutshell this is the belief that Jesus wasn't really human. Jesus was fully divine, but his humanness was just an illusion. It means that as Jesus walked on earth, he only appeared to be human. He was really, if you like, a bit like a ghost. This understanding is a problem though for the death and resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was fully divine and not human, then his death, resurrection and ascension cannot have really taken place. And Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension are central to a Biblical understanding of who God really is. If there is no human Jesus, there is no gospel.

As Max Lucado writes:

- The Cross prepares us for eternity.
- If there is no cross of Christ, then there is no truth to Christ.
- To remove the cross is to remove the linchpin from the door of hope.
- If there is no cross, then there is no sacrifice for sin.
- If there is no sacrifice for sin, how will you face a Holy God – will you cleanse your own sin?
- If there is no cross, then there is no resurrection.
- If there is no resurrection, how will you live again?

That Jesus was fully human is critical to the Christian Faith. The idea that Jesus was fully divine and not fully human, or human at all, probably comes from the Greek idea that the body was evil, and only a person's spirit was good. The view was that anything physical was negative. What was important, and what should be the focus, was the spiritual.

By now you may be wondering why I'm even talking about this. After all, we don't think like that today and we don't believe what Docetism teaches.

Well, let me ask you a question: what is the more important – the prayer meeting or breakfast? Ok, so here's what I think you might be thinking: because we're Christians and we're watching this service, we all know the answer is the prayer meeting. People won't get saved if we eat a good breakfast, but they might if we pray for them. Now, I know that you know what I'm doing here. I'm making a point. But some of you will no doubt be shouting at the screen 'breakfast is more important!'

But, here's the thing, my best guess is that deep down, even if you are shouting 'breakfast' at the screen, you really do think the prayer meeting is more important – and you feel a little guilty because, mostly, you choose breakfast over the prayer meeting. Perhaps though, truth is, it's the wrong question.

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.^[c] ⁹ When

they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21 v 1-14)

What's the first thing Jesus does with and for these disciples after a long, hard, fruitless nights fishing, after they've landed the fish he's miraculously given them? Breakfast... he cooks and gives them breakfast. He does not invite them to a prayer meeting, he does not invite them to a seminar on how to fish. He does not invite them to a discussion about why they are back at the Sea of Galilee again, fishing. He invites them to breakfast on the beach.

Apparently, at this point in his meeting with the disciples, Jesus doesn't focus on anything we might think of as spiritual issues - faithfulness, calling, guidance for the future. What he does is he invites them to breakfast, he meets their physical needs. These guys were hungry and eating is a very human thing to do.

The Bible makes it very clear that Jesus too, did very human things. Jesus got physically tired like we do. 'Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon' (John 4:6)

Jesus needed his sleep – even in a storm.

²² One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. ²³ As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵ "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement, they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”
(Luke 8 v 22-24)

Jesus got thirsty.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” (John 19v28)

Jesus had a physical body that people could touch.

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”
(John 20 v 27)

Jesus felt and expressed human emotions. John tells us that Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35). On the beach, after a long night’s fishing, Jesus knows and understands that the disciples were hungry, and breakfast was needed.

The question: “Which is more important, the prayer meeting or breakfast?’ I suggest may be the wrong question. It feeds into the idea that we separate out the physical and the spiritual and make one of them more important than the other. The truth is, they are both important. It is important that we attend to spiritual issues like faithfulness and prayer. The prayer meeting is important, as is faithfulness, but our human needs are important too, and, sometimes the best thing we can do is to attend to our physical needs. There may be times when the prayer meeting is more important than the breakfast, but there may also be times when breakfast is more important than the prayer meeting.

We are much better today about talking about our mental health. It is interesting though, that where most of us are happy to seek help if we suffer physically, we might still, not be so good if we suffer mentally.

When I was taken ill with the Covid virus, I was very grateful for the medics who helped me, from the ambulance crew who first attended to me, to those in the hospital and those of you who were at the end of a phone offering help and support. As far as I can tell, I have recovered fully from any physical effects of the virus, but I have a friend who I speak with every month, who helps me with my mental health. He helps me wrestle with thought patterns and how they affect me. Perhaps, sometimes, we neglect our mental health.

Sometimes, for some of us, the physical and the mental are connected. I do much better mentally if I get regular exercise, good sleep and I eat sensibly. Sometimes, for some people, medication is a necessary part of attending to their mental health. We may need the help of our GP or other mental health professionals – but they are God’s gift to us. Perhaps a challenge for many of us, is to be more at ease with being human. And, perhaps, sometimes in our desire to become more spiritual we neglect our humanity. I, for one, know and understand that challenge – sometimes, I simply don’t take a break!

God though, when he created the world, looked at everything he had created, and declared it very good (Genesis 1 v 31). Perhaps there’s a better question than – What’s more important, the prayer meeting or breakfast? Perhaps the better question is: “What kind of God have you got?”

Perhaps you have a cold, harsh, demanding God who is mostly uninterested with anything you do and irritated by your presence. Perhaps you have a God who is endlessly good, uncontrollably generous and irrationally loving, who is tender and gentle. Maybe that God is the God who sees you as a whole person.

And it makes a real difference if this God, in Jesus, is fully human. If he is fully human then he knows what its like to be human. If he is human, he not only knows what it’s like to be human, he is able to empathise with us as we face the real challenges of life.

The writer to the Hebrews says it this way.

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4 v 15-16)

The writer invites us to come to the God who is ready to listen and who fully understands our most challenging moments and struggles. Maybe this God really is endlessly good, uncontrollably generous and irrationally loving, tender and gentle. The God who sees and understand us as a whole person.

If, on the other hand, Jesus is not fully human, then perhaps he is cold and harsh, and demanding, unable or unwilling to understand how life really is.

So, what kind of God do you have?

Back on the beach, Jesus invites the disciples to breakfast. The disciples, John tells us, ate breakfast in silence. Well, actually he says none of them dared ask Jesus who he was. It seems odd they neither appeared to speak or ask him who he was – surely they knew! The word John uses for ‘ask’ means to interrogate. Perhaps, knowing exactly who it was, they had many, many questions – many things they were grappling with. We know that challenge and questions were coming, for Peter especially, but for all of them. Sometimes silence is best though, to sit in God’s presence and say nothing, to worship him in the midst of our questions.

Jesus, it seems, is not in a rush for questions, he’s prepared to wait. And, let’s be honest, sometimes we are not even sure what we think of Jesus, of God, of what he is or isn’t doing. Sometimes we have so many questions we don’t even know where to start. Perhaps worship is sometimes jumping into the mystery, the mystery of who God is, who we are and all the questions we bring. And God, it seems, is ok with that – he sits with his disciples, in silence, in the midst of unasked questions.

Worship is, however we do it, however we express it, a declaration of hope. It is a declaration of hope in the mystery of life, in the God who is endlessly loving, uncontrollably generous and irrationally loving, who is tender and gentle, and who sees us as a whole person, the one who will invite us to breakfast and sit with us, with all our questions and struggles.

The disciples, in all their uncertainty, somehow knew that the one who was with them, over breakfast on the beach, could only be Jesus – and that he was worth following. And maybe that can be true for us too.

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