



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Who God Thinks You Are” **Sermon on Mark 8:27-35**

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You are about to hear in our scripture a question that is at the heart of Mark’s Gospel. It is one thing to give an answer. It is quite another to live the answer.

Mark 8: 27-35

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.’

“You are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things.” Setting your mind on divine things. That’s why some of you are here. You have had a week of challenges, arguments, disappointments, struggles, and worries. You have come to worship to “fill up your tank” so that you can get through another week. This is an intentional setting of the mind on divine things in order to make it through a week of “human things.”

How much of your brain power, say over the last week, was spent on cogitating human things, and how much on divine things? Look, I work at a church, and still human things win hands down.

I've never worn a collar but maybe it would help me focus my attention on the divine. I don't mean a clerical collar. I mean one of those little dog collars with the zappers on it. The ones that give a little jolt to keep the puppy from tugging and straying. After a while, the puppy learns what not to do.

Wouldn't that be something if we all wore dog collars and God could give us a little jolt to keep our minds in the realm of the divine?

Stuck in traffic and about to come off the rails. Zap! Oh, yes, thank you God.
When you're calculating whether it's worth it to be kind. Zap!
When you're about to lose a friend because of politics. Pow!
When you're calculating what to spend on yourself in a world of hungry people. Zing!
When your mind veers off the sermon....

Some of you would be in a state of perpetual shock therapy. I'm not mentioning any names, Donovan. But the brain goes to the place of least resistance! The easiest thing for the brain to think about is being human. Many of you majored in that in college as you say in your faith stories, "I grew up in the church. High school youth group. But in college, I kind of strayed away." Sunday morning was spent on recovery after a night of exploring human things. I can't talk about that because we're in church.

We like to keep the divine things separate from the human things because when they come together, it's hard to explain.

TJ read to you the story of the covenant of God with Abram. Abram was minding his own business when suddenly God speaks to him, "Go from your country and your father's house to the land I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

The first time God says this to Abram was when Abram was 75 years old. When I'm 75 years old, I want to be mostly about human things like, "How am I going to get out of this recliner?" The only divine I'm looking to enter into are the pearly gates and I'd like to put that off for as long as possible.

But Abram embraces the divine for that paragraph. He follows God's direction, takes Sarai, his wife, and at 75 years old, tells his father he's leaving home. To which his father says, "Your mother and I have been praying for this day for 53 years." Some kids just won't leave. That's not in the text, but it's in the text. Abram follows the divine for about one paragraph.

They end up in Egypt. Abram thinks the Egyptians are going to kill him because he's with the beautiful Sarai. "No, I'm not married to her. She's my sister." That's really human. God just spoke to you about making a great nation. It didn't even register. The divine is fleeting. One moment you and God are two peas in a pod, the next moment God says to you, "Get behind me, Satan." "You are setting your mind NOT on divine things, but on human things."

We were talking about this in Bible Study on Wednesday, and what came to mind for Rudy Kalis was something that happened recently. He was backing out his car at the Temple Hills Country Club and he backed into another car. "I've never done that. I can't believe I just did that." And he said, "I thought for a moment. I looked around and wondered if anyone saw me. I could just drive away." But then he got zapped!

If you know Rudy, you'll know that he got zapped not because he wears a collar, but because he immerses himself in the Word so much of the time. And the discipline of that will get you!

"I know who you are...you are the Christ." The divine pushed away the human thing and he got out of his car. He started to write out his confession and his phone number, when he saw a young woman, maybe 25 years old, come out of the club. "Is this your car? I'm so sorry but I backed into it". Rudy said, "She couldn't have been nicer. She said, 'These things happen. We're all human,'" which is a rather divine thing to say to the person who just put a dent in the side of her car. "She was so kind!"

When Rudy told the story in Bible study, I thought it was a little bump, until Rudy sent me a photo of the woman's car. Let me tell you, if that had been my car, I would have come out of the clubhouse with a sore neck. Is there a lawyer in the house?"

I'm human!

Rudy was amazed by her! Thanking her for her kindness. "How is it that you have such a wonderful spirit?", he asked. And she said, "I've always just been a positive person."

Now here's the thing! Rudy didn't tell me this, but I think Rudy was hoping. And I was hoping that she would have said, "I'm a Christian. I'm a follower of Christ." I wish she would have said, "I go to Bible study, I keep my mind on scripture. I know it's just a car. A thing that moth and rust will destroy, but my treasure is in heaven, and the choice is easy."

But, no! "I'm just a positive person." That's not a faith statement. That's a human statement.

Where has the divine gone in this country? The growing trend is on human things.

Twenty per cent of the people in our country identify as "Nones." N-O-N-E-S. That means they have no religious affiliation. It's a fast-growing percentage. It grows about five per cent every five years.

I bump into them more and more. And they don't look a thing like the devil. In fact, they believe in many of the same things I believe.

They believe in love. That's a divine thing.

They believe in light. That's a divine thing.

They believe in the hope that things can transform for the good. That's a divine thing.

They believe in forgiveness and reconciliation.

We're only human. Yet, it's a divine thing.

They will even say that they believe there is a force, a vibe, a mystery out there that cannot be explained. They believe in the same things we do. They just call it something else. They just don't want to be part of our congregation.

Do they think the Church is of no earthly good? Somehow and somehow, we don't seem to measure up to even the best of humanity, let alone the divine. It's been that way forever! It's in our story.

Adam and Eve twist their minds to think that eating an apple will make them become like God - a rather human thing to want to be a god.

Cane kills Able after church one day, because Cane doesn't like the way the offering is being taken up. That's a very human thing to do.

Abraham and Sarah can't hold onto the promise.

Jacob lies to his father and cheats his brother. Such a human thing to do.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Such a human thing to do.

Joseph saves his brothers, but holds off on salvation for the longest time just to see them squirm. It's such a human thing to do.

David has eyes for Bathsheba. Sends her husband to the front. Very human thing to do.

There is so much divine in the Bible, and yet the humans choose a human over and over again. What's this about?

When God comes to earth, when the divine is flesh and blood, what side do you think Jesus will choose? Jesus sets his mind on the cross. Now if you think about it, the cross is the most human thing you can think of – so mean, gritty, and awful. I mean, it's a killing thing that you put on a hill, so everyone has a good view of the action. Entertainment. That's human.

Jesus puts his mind on the human thing, the cross. A human thing, and such things like that, turn it into the divine. It's only God that can take the human thing and turn it into the divine. Only God in you...

This could be just another day. Another trip around the sun. Or it could be the day the Lord has made, and you may spot another human and give them that love, that light, that prayer. It's divine.

It could be just another day. Last night, I was watching the last story on the news about a woman in Atlanta who drove 70 miles an hour through town, hit a car and killed the driver. The daughter whose mother was killed wanted justice. She wanted to make sure that the woman who killed her mother would rot in jail. When she met the woman who killed her mother, she said, "I forgive you." When asked why, she said, "I heard the voice of my mother, a preacher, who spoke of forgiveness all her life." Not only did she forgive her, but she meets with her, hugs her, laughs with her. Truly amazing. Truly divine. The nasty turns into the divine.

So, it could be on this day the Lord has made that the most positive person might have a bad day, and they might bump into you, a community, that understands that we're all human, that this world could use a prayer. And isn't that divine?

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