

The Exaltation of Humanity

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Text: John 17:20-26.

“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me.... Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory” (Jn 17:21-24).

In this final Sunday before Pentecost, let's take one last, long, loving look back toward Easter.

In the sermon preached on Good Friday, I recommended three words to understand the meaning of Christ's work on the cross. The first word was “Silence,” which is God's response when we try to explain to Him that we're really not such bad people. The second word was “Exchange,” because on the cross God takes the place of the sinners—us—and receives the punishment due us. The third word was “Humiliation,” because God emptied Himself of His Godhead to perform that exchange. That the Son of God died for us, was cursed for us, was buried for us, and was estranged from God the Father—all for us. In other words, that on the cross, God was humiliated.

On the cross, God was humiliated. But of course, that was not the end of the story, for in three days God raised Jesus from the dead. So we can say that on the cross, God was humiliated, but in the resurrection, humanity was exalted. Humanity was exalted.

Wait a minute, you might say—that doesn't seem very fair. If God was humiliated on the cross, then it should be *His* turn to be exalted. But that's not exactly how John puts it in his gospel. John uses the phrase “Son of Man” six times to refer to Jesus being “lifted up” or glorified or ascending. For example in John chapter six we hear Jesus say “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53). The phrase “Son of Man” in John emphasizes His humanity. When the son goes into the far country he takes on the *nature* of the people of the far country and takes on real humanity. He takes on our humanity for His death and He takes on our humanity for His resurrection. According to Paul, Jesus is the firstborn from the dead so that in everything He might have the supremacy. The resurrection of the body is, first and foremost, the resurrection of the body of Jesus. But because He represents us and He enfolds us, we partake in the resurrection of the body of Jesus. As Paul says, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will *certainly* also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (R 6:5). And if resurrection, then also exaltation and glory. “Father,” Jesus says, “I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, the glory you have given me” (Jn 17:24).

On the cross, God was humiliated; in the resurrection, humanity is exalted.

In the cross we hear from God, “I will be your God.” That's no small feat considering how far we were from God and how God had to pay the supreme penalty to draw us near. He had to empty Himself of His Godhead; something, as was said on Good Friday, that only God can do.

In the cross we hear from God, “I *will* be your God.” And in the resurrection we hear from God, “And you will be my people.” We are His people in His Son, with the Father and the Son and the

Holy Spirit in glory. We do not become God, but in Him we live in what we must call the “humanity of God.”

In the cross we hear, “I will be your God;” and in the resurrection we hear, “and you will be my people.”

So it’s time to ask the exciting question, what does this exaltation mean? What are some of the implications for us? I’d like to mention just four implications; or maybe more accurately, four views of *one* implication.

The first is that through the resurrection and through the exaltation and through the glory, people *will believe*. As Jesus says, “[M]ay they also be in us, so that the world may *believe* that you have sent me.” According to the gospels, belief in Jesus on the part of the disciples before the resurrection is kind of off again, on again. But after the resurrection—in Matthew, Luke and John at least—that’s where their understanding really kicks in. At the tomb, John the disciple gets there before Peter and “He saw and *he* believed” (Jn 20:8). On the road to Damascus Saul hears the voice of Jesus and instantly comprehends that the resurrection *must be* real. And *he* believes. Thomas is told to put his fingers in the wounds of the resurrected Jesus to cure his skepticism. Jesus tells him, “Stop doubting and believe” (Jn 20:27). And *he* believes. The resurrection is the place of belief. The wounds of the resurrected Jesus are where we can take refuge. Where *our* skepticism can be cured. Where the modern *world’s* skepticism can be cured. The resurrection is the place how the *kingdom* of God will move forward.

The second implication is that because of the humanity of God, in which we live, we can *hear new things*. The days of being able to preach to people outside the church without listening are gone, my friends. And I have to tell you, I myself am not such a good listener. But I can learn. To use one example, on Easter, Diane preached a great sermon and mentioned that Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the resurrection. A woman gives first witness after the resurrection and Peter and John *listened*. And Diane mentioned, Tabitha was a disciple in Jobba who died, whom Peter raised from the dead and so who became herself a resurrection.

But in the history of the Church we have not been so good about listening to women. And by “we” I mean middle-aged white guys. In the late 2nd century God lobbed a softball to the church by means of a renewal movement called “Montanism.” Now Montanism had its weak points—every movement does. But it was a movement of prophecy and a movement that believed strongly in the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit and it was a movement with two very strong and very popular female leaders. But the middle-aged white guys in the established leadership of the orthodox church—the mainstream church—declared Montanism a heresy. And that was really the end of female leadership in the church for more than a thousand years. And that’s a shame.

The history of the Church and the history of this country and the history of our lives are histories filled with sadness, with regretful decisions. Lonesome histories, really. But the exaltation of humanity in the resurrection means that we can listen to *new voices*. That even our lonesomeness can be blessed, and the unknown can be known. That, as Diane mentioned, Thomas in all his loneliness and his skepticism can touch the new body of the resurrected Jesus. And believe.

The third implication is that because we have the kind of oneness with God that the Father shares with the Son, intimacy is possible. The word of God to us was once, “Silence,” but now it’s, “Speak.” “Speak up!” Now He can’t hear enough from us. Now God always has a cup of coffee in His hand; He’s always ready for a good chat, a good chin wag. Now it’s “I’m so *glad* you called.”

Now it's, to quote the Song of Solomon, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come" (SS 2:10-12).

The fourth implication is that, "It doesn't need to be like this." And when you ask, "*What* doesn't need to be like this?" the answer is, Yes. Everything. The forty days between the resurrection and the ascension are completely different from the three years from the start of Jesus' ministry to the cross. He shows us that resurrection life can be so different from ordinary life, that it can be full of the kingdom, the power and the glory. That we can see the glory of God.

That's the good news—that it doesn't need to be like this. And that's all that evangelism is, that through words or through an act of kindness or even through a kind glance we convey the message that we know that it doesn't need to be like this.

I come from the world of business, and the world of business is built on the law of scarcity, namely, that there isn't really enough of anything for everyone to have as much as they want. So people have to work to get currency to get a little more of what they want and of what they need. Business exists because of scarcity. And Jesus is a realist, so He understands scarcity, and He honors scarcity. Some of the time. But He also says that He came to bring us life, and to bring it abundantly (Jn 10:10). He asks the disciples what they have in terms of food to feed the five thousand and they answer, "Not nearly enough." Five loaves, two fish. And Jesus replies, "Okay, I hear you. Let's feed everybody." When we say we are weary, Jesus answers that no one will snatch us out of His hand; when we say we are stumbling in meaningless darkness, Jesus answers that He is the light of the world and that whoever follows Him will *have* the light of life; when we just want to touch His cloak for a little healing He holds out His hands and says "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." He says, "You will be my people." He says, "It doesn't need to be like this." In the face of scarcity, we can have abundance; after humiliation can come exaltation; in the face of fear and of anger and of cynicism He can reply, "Okay, I hear you. Now let's feed everybody."

Resurrection means that we don't need to fear scarcity. In fact, the modernist world need not fear scarcity; it should fear the resurrection. And this is the final implication we'll draw. As NT Wright says:

It is in fact only with the bodily resurrection of Jesus, demonstrating that His death dealt the decisive blow to evil that we can find the proper ground for working to call the kingdoms of the earth to submit to the kingdom of God.... Easter challenges the social and political pretensions of modernism, both right-wing and left-wing. And modernism knows it. Perhaps the most important thing then about the resurrection is also the most deeply counter-cultural in our own day, that a deeply orthodox theology—about the resurrection and good deal else besides—is the proper seed bed of radical politics.

On the cross, God is humiliated. He becomes a curse for humanity. But in the resurrection, humanity is exalted. In Christ He brings us up into His presence, so that because of the resurrection we can speak not only of the *deity* of God but also of the *humanity* of God; so that we can speak of us being one as the Father and the Son and the Spirit are one, to be one with them and one with one another, in royal and glorious and powerful exaltation, forever and ever.