



Fully Alive –Diane Christopher
Genesis 1:27 and Colossians 1:15; 2:6-7, 9-10
October 30, 2016

As a pastor, I hear many reasons why people will not come to church. You have heard them, too, probably when you ask people to come to church with you. One of the reasons I hear is this: the church is made up of hypocrites. The church is made up of people acting badly.

When I hear things like that, I respond with something like this, “Well, the Church is made up of humans, what do you expect? Humans mess up; they make mistakes; they are sinners.” Aren’t our mistakes a part of what makes us human?

Recently, I have come to the conclusion that I don’t like that answer anymore – that we make mistakes because we are human. It sounds kind of fatalistic...this is the way we are. There is nothing we can do about it.

During my Sabbatical I came across a certain quote by a church father named Irenaeus (ear ra ny’ us), who lived in the 2nd century. He said this, “The glory of God is man fully alive.” The glory of God is man fully alive.

I’ve been thinking about that statement a lot. How can the glory of God and humans be connected? Does this mean that the glory of God is in you and me when we fully alive? If so, what does it mean to be fully alive? And how do we get there?

Turn with me to our scripture passages this morning.

I did something today that I rarely do. Normally, I pick a scripture passage, and then try to discover what God is saying through that passage. Today, however, I

chose my scripture passages because they fit what I wanted to say to you. I guess you could say I am manipulating scripture to fit my thesis, but I think it is still true.

Before we read, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

The first scripture: Genesis 1:17 “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

One day a spiritual teacher asked his disciples why God made humans. One of them – an eager young man – answered almost immediately, “That, teacher, is easy. So we can pray.” After a brief silence, the teacher asked another question: “Why, then did God make angels?” The same young man tried again, “Perhaps so that they also could pray.”

The teacher looked at him and smiled. “The angels,” he said, “are perfectly capable of offering prayer to God, but only humans can do what they are uniquely created to do.” “What is that?” the eager disciple asked. “What God wants from humans and what only humans can do is become fully human.”

In the creation story, the word “good” is used seven times. This includes the creation of human beings. Not only are humans a good creation, but we are made in the image of God. We are the only thing in all creation that is made in the image of God. There is a part of God in us, and that is what makes us human. We were made to glorify God.

But then sin entered the world. What happened is sin made us less human, not more human. Sin diminished the glory of life we were given.

As Christians, we hear a lot about original sin, but we do not hear much about original glory. That’s a new term for you! Listen to Psalm 8:

What are human beings
that You think about them;

What are human beings
that You pay attention to them?
You've made them only slightly less than divine,
crowning them with glory and grandeur.

When humans were originally created, we were crowned with glory and honor. Original glory. But sin diminished that glory and made us less human.

We all grew up watching the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. In the original story (and this was not brought out in the movie), the tin man was a real man who was in love with a beautiful maiden. The wicked witch hated his love, and cast a spell on him that made him a tin man without a heart...therefore, he couldn't love any more. He was reduced to sort of a machine – a hollow man. He had fallen from the life he was meant to live. His quest was to find his heart so he could become fully alive – the way he was created.

Our quest is to become more like how we were originally created – to become more fully alive for the glory of God.

Any of you here watch the TV show *The Walking Dead*? I have never seen the show and have no wish to see the show, but I do know something about zombies. They're not alive, but they're not dead either – they are just "un-dead." They move around at will, but without any sense of real life.

They don't care about others, even other zombies, they just want to eat – anything warm with a pulse. They wander from place to place with no purpose, no plan; they are free but also enslaved to their condition.

Sometimes I think we live our walk with Jesus like Zombies – enslaved to our condition, not fully dead and not fully alive. We do not act like what we were created to be: crowned with glory and honor.

This leads us to our next several scripture passages:

Colossians 1:15: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Remember what Jesus said, “When you see me, you see the Father.” “I and the Father are one.”

Colossians 2:6-7, 9-10

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness....For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.”

Going back to the Iranaeus (ear ra ny’ us) quote: The glory of God is man fully alive. Jesus is ‘fully alive’ without sin – in other words, Jesus is true humanity, what we were originally created to be.

God’s goal in Jesus is to make us fully alive; in other words, *more* human, not less. We were created to show God’s glory. So Jesus came and showed us what “fully alive” looks like. In fact, Jesus said I came to give you life and to give it to you abundantly.

We are glorious beings, my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to become more fully alive and deeply human. We are called to become the persons God created us to be. As our scripture says we are filled with the fullness of Christ who bears the image of the invisible God. We have it so God can be glorified.

So what does it mean to be fully alive in Christ? It is not our modern day notion of “living life to its fullest.” I hear this often at memorials – that the deceased lived life to the fullest. They traveled, did a lot of things, lived life with zest. And there is certainly nothing wrong with that – we should fully enjoy the gift of life we have been given.

But to be fully alive in Christ means enjoying a deep friendship with the Lord.

Brad Monroe, the pastor to Presbytery, writes an article in our Presbytery’s newsletter that comes out every Friday. In last Friday’s newsletter, he talked

about levels of discipleship, in other words, levels of knowing Jesus. He gave three different levels of knowing Jesus (as I give these, see which level you are):

Level one: being friendly with Jesus. Those who are friendly with Jesus believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, think about God sometimes, maybe read a scripture passage once in a while, might do an occasional service project.

Level two in knowing Jesus is the close friend of Jesus. This person puts more trust in Jesus, takes steps to grow spiritually. They regularly serve others.

The third level is knowing Jesus as a confidant. This person finds it hard to remember or imagine life without Christ as their Savior, Lord and constant companion. This person is willing to respond to the nudge of the HS, even when the HS nudges beyond the comfort zone. In other words, this person is fully alive in Christ.

Brad mentioned that a survey was conducted in 10,000 churches. The study revealed that 60% of a typical congregation's members are merely friendly with Jesus. In other words, yes, Jesus is their Savior, but don't ask Jesus to challenge me or change my life.

Our task as a church is to help you take the next step, to get to the next level of friendship with Jesus. We invite you and challenge you, as Brad says, "to go a wee bit deeper into reflection of scripture, a hair's breadth wider into compassion for others, or a whisper louder toward expressing faith in public realms."

Then he ends his newsletter by saying, "Getting fired up for the Lord." This is being fully alive for the glory of God. As our scripture passage today says "continue to live your lives in him, rooted and build up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness."

This is what we do as a church. We take you to the next step to become more fully alive in Christ. This is why we offer worship, Bible studies, small groups, service projects, fellowship times. We do this so you can go deeper in your

relationship with Christ, to become more fully alive, to be more what you were created to be, to be more human.

This leads me to our project in Advent. We are offering The Journey. I have been wanted to do an all-church study here for a long time. Finally last Spring, I got Larry and Paul to agree to do this for Advent. We are going to travel with Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and we are going to do it together. As a Body of Believers, for 5 weeks we will all study the same thing – in classes, at home, in worship.

The children in the nursery and Sunday School are studying the same material as well.

This is how it will work: I invite you to sign up for a class. After worship today and over the next few Sundays, stop by the Faith Formation Kiosk in the Fellowship Hall and sign up for a 5-week study group. We are offering 6 different days and time slots. When you sign up, you will purchase a book and a devotional.

Before each class meets, you will read the assigned chapter in the book. During class, you will watch a video by the author of the book as he shows you the sights and sounds of the Holy Land. Then a moderator will lead the class through a discussion of what you read in the book. The following Sunday, Pastor Paul and I will give a sermon on what you studied during the week.

It is our hope that as we come together as a Body of Christ and study the same thing, we will be built up in Christ and strengthened in our faith. It will pull us together as a Body of Believers and continue to heal our hearts and minds and souls. As a result, we will become more fully human to the glory of God.

And as we become more fully human to the glory of God, let us watch with eager expectation what new thing God will do with us and through us to bring the glory of God to others.

At the end of this week, you will receive a letter from Pastor Paul and me. This letter will contain a pledge card for the year 2017. This letter will ask you to prayerfully consider what you will give financially in the coming year.

Will you support this church in all that it does to help you be who you were meant to be – a creation of God, made in God’s image, to become fully alive for the glory of God. Because in Christ, you have been brought to fullness.
Amen.