

The Most Human Moment

Overwhelmed in Compassion

Relentless Series: Palm Sunday

Lent Week 6 - April 10th, 2022

Rev.Rynn Parraw

Exodus 32:1-26

Zechariah 9:9-17

Psalm 118:19-29

Mark 11:1-25

Philippians 4:4-9

It's hard for the human mind to understand things beyond a dualistic perspective and so a concept like a fully divine and fully human being is really hard to wrap your mind around. Some people worship Yeshua as though he is divinity incarnate, and he was. Other people worship Yeshua as though he was the perfect version of a human, and he was. But we tend to project or layer our understanding of his teachings onto how we understand him. And for a man who taught about love, we paint him with this very docile pastel-coloured filter. We make him all of the things that he taught about in the beatitudes by making him meek, docile, gentle and forgiving, and he was. He was the embodiment of love, but sometimes love is fierce.

We look at him as divinity walking around in human form because we forget that he came in human form to make divinity relevant to us. By focussing only on his divinity and how perfect he was, what we do is make him irrelevant. We make him the exception to every rule. Yes, he is a goal for us all to aim for in our own embodiment, but because he was of divine nature, we don't actually expect ourselves to realistically be able to pull it off. It's not 'he did it, therefore, I can', it's 'well, he did it because of who he was but I'm not him so I can't possibly actually pull it off'. Instead of using him as the invitation of embodiment, instead, we use him as an excuse for our failures and even to make ourselves shamed out of even trying. We don't have that divine nature so we can't pull it off.

But as we move into Holy Week through the palm frawn feathered gateway of Palm Sunday, we have to remember in these moments throughout this week that although he

was of divine nature he was a human. He was a perfect Jew, the perfection of the old law to prove that it is possible to live it as a human, but also that he was a human man going through his very human experiences. Even though he had the foresight, knowing and understanding we see on the cross that he couldn't save himself. People used that line to mock him, but it has a totally deeper meaning. He could have saved himself because he's capable of it - because he saw it coming - but he couldn't save himself because it was his destiny not to. And a huge part of being human is being surrendered to the divine plan whether we know it's happening or we don't.

Throughout most of his life and teachings, the way we read the story is as a very superhuman - meta-human - but throughout the Holy Week stories, we finally get to see a flash of the humanity of Yeshua coming through. Some of my favourite stories come from the Palm Sunday reading. This day more than any other day he proved how human he really was.

Some of the leading characters throughout the Bible were meant to be the exemplary version of what God wants people to be, and they messed up big. Moses was known for being quite demure, in a lot of modern traditions he is depicted as being this angry fellow who is off doing things and a strong leader who is taking people through the sea, but when you read the Bible and the description of Moses he's incredibly shy. He's rendered almost mute when asked to speak to people. That's why his brother Aaron ended up becoming his right-hand man as a team effort. Moses couldn't speak much less command.

There are several examples where God gives him very simple instructions on how to do something like 'raise your staff and water will come out' but instead he takes the stick and smashes it several times on a rock and makes a big exhibition of it in order to put a show on to prove a point. God got mad a few times because he made a demonstration out of a simple act that was meant to show God's power. And so, as shy as he was he also had a temper.

Moses loved God and cared deeply for the people that he didn't even know were his people. Remember that in the beginning of his story he was raised by the Egyptians and didn't even necessarily know that he was Hebrew until he was likely in his 20s. And yet almost immediately he flies off the handle and starts defending his own people. But, as he has confrontation issues, when he's not in a fit of rage, he's a runner. After murdering a

slave driver for mistreating the slaves he literally runs away and is gone for decades before God gives him the commission to go back and extract the people.

So, it's fair to say that Moses has an MO, a mode of operation. He is righteous once he knows the details of the situation, he is temperamental when things aren't how they're supposed to be, he is nonconfrontational and literally runs away from every fight and won't stand up and speak even when he's given the exact words to say, and then when people don't follow through with what he says he throws another fit and usually makes things very uncomfortable for everyone around. This is the guy who is supposed to be the leader of the people and a favourite of God who gets to have an intimate relationship where he actually knows God. He spends more than half of his life wearing a veil because the glory of God reveals itself to him and he can't be around normal people, but it sounds like he couldn't really be around normal people to begin with.

Moses has a very private relationship with God on Mount Sinai. God chooses to reveal himself to Moses and to spend time with him and explain the details of the plan and the detailed instructions for the people. Most of us know the story of the 10 Commandments being written on stone slabs but if you look at the first five books of the Bible, the really hard to read ones like Deuteronomy and Leviticus are all the 614 laws that the Hebrew people are expected to follow. The one book is for the people and their expectations, and the other book is for the expectations of the priests and their rights and rituals. All of that was dictated to Moses on that mountain. But we only ever think of the 10 Commandments that are inscribed on the stone tablets.

Clearly, he was not climbing down the mountain with tablets that held the entirety of those two books of the Bible which are the law, but the 10 Commandments were inscribed on stone because they were a permanent law. The other ones were not inscribed in stone but they were preserved through parchment and being re-written every time the paper or ink was going to fade. They were transcribed continually in order to be preserved as scrolls and read aloud to the people to educate people on repeat about what was expected of them.

The fact that they weren't inscribed in the stone is noteworthy. The laws of Moses were never intended to be a permanent installation held over the people. They are the plumbline of accountability for the time that the people are in that type of care, but God had always had promises, although they weren't delivered until potentially thousands of

years later through the prophets, He always intended to save the people from slavery. And if you read the Bible a certain way that slavery includes being a slave to the law.

That's where Yeshua comes in. He was the fulfilment of the law which meant from that time on everyone else was free and clear. They did not have to live up to all of those laws or make all of those compensations because they were washed clean and given a fresh start. We forget that, but that's understandable as we forget what even the 10 Commandments were, even more so what they actually meant.

It's a different conversation entirely to focus on the depth of meaning of those 10 Commandments, which we do look at in our Foundations of Faith Sermon Series if you're wanting to know more about what those commandments actually meant and what God still expects of His people in His timelessness. But just for today, let's take a moment and focus on the humanity in the Hebrew story.

Moses and Yeshua we're both known as prophets. They delivered the next level, the next layer of God's expectations to the people and their job is to hold the people accountable. Moses' commission only lasted the length of his very human life, Yeshua's extends throughout his life but as he conquered death he still hasn't actually died yet and so he remains the everlasting king to which we are accountable: The Prince of Peace.

We often focus on the exceptional of the prophets, and we dismiss or don't even notice their humanity. It's not that we forgive their humanity, which I certainly think we should learn to be doing, but rather we just make them the exemption of the rule the exception of it instead of the embodiment of it.

Moses had been gone a long time, 40 days on the top of the mountain. When we read the Bible stories without context we think: wow that's a huge mountain, that's a massive climb. I climbed Mount Sinai in under two hours, most do it in about four. It's not a huge hike. The 40 days were spent at the top in communion with God.

When Moses goes up the mountain, he's gone for a long time. 40 days is basically a month and a half, it's the entire length of the Easter/Lent or Christmas/Advent season. When he goes up, he's fasting. He gives up the human habits and practices in order to pursue God and commune with Him. Essentially he's being nourished and fed by communion with God, but he takes no food and very little water certainly not enough to last a month

and a half. It doesn't rain, there is no pool of water sitting at the top of the mountain. There's no vegetation growing or food provided on it.

In the mornings there is the condensation on the top of the mountain in the small pooled rock features, but by mid-day it's all dried up. So you can get a cup or two of water if you're the lucky, first thing in the morning. That's what I did. But the whole rest of the time you're up there you're fasting even water.

Being gone for 40 days, the people who are waiting at the bottom for him to come back with instructions before they can move on with their lives are wondering the entire time if he's ever coming back. If he's even alive. And so, they get impatient and Aaron is left in charge. They ask Aaron to take care of them and basically bully him into providing a different way under the guise of: 'well, Moses isn't coming back and God has abandoned us here'. People don't have huge attention spans.

When we read the Bible, we see the Exodus story as being very impatient people who constantly forget that God is taking care of them. But we don't really remember how much time passes between potentially one verse and the very next. People are going months and years between events that prove God's presence. I think most of us understand what that feels like. You can have one moment that feels like divine intervention and destiny coming to fruition and then years of nothing but crickets chirping in the distance waiting and listening for God to speak with no experience of a response. And even if you do think He's speaking, sometimes it's a vague whisper you're not even sure if it's from Him or not. So we get it when we think of it that way. Not only are they in the desert but they are also basically put on pause for long periods of time to just sit and wait.

The people convince Aaron to provide a different god, who will be more hands-on and involved in their lives. One they can actually interact with. Remember that they are coming out of Egypt where there are dozens of gods. The main nine at least are carved as idols. There are images to work with. There are stories to tell you how to recognize them moving in this world. A lot of real-life experiences are given as legends to explain in the context of the presence of that god interfering in our world. So even though you never see a lioness-headed goddess walking past, anytime you see something that they say is her doing, you then see her presence until you feel more like they're there. Even though it's only ever a carved idol that you're talking to.

With YHWH, the Hebrew God, everything was very ambiguous. He had no form or face and there weren't really even stories of Him being involved in life. The first-generation exodus people had some awesome miracle stories but they were the exception, they were anomalies. They weren't ways to recognize God moving in everyday life. The Hebrew people never really had that, it wasn't until the Christians started talking about the Holy Spirit moving that we were taught by Yeshua how do you even recognize God's movement in this world. So we can understand how lonely that feels.

But, the people convinced Aaron to carve a calf out of gold. It wasn't a calf, as in the sacrifices they would make for hundreds of years, those laws were being written up the mountain and they didn't know about that yet. That was Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of Love. She was the main goddess that was worshipped where they had just left.

The Bible gives a detailed account of how he collected the gold, that he carved out the image, he set it up, and they crafted this whole celebration and ceremony around worshipping and honouring this calf that he had clearly made. And then you can hear the shouts of celebration even on top of the mountain. God says 'Move!' and down Moses went to try and stop the people. Imagine running down a mountain carrying blocks of stone that you can't afford to break. He didn't have a backpack to put them in so he's literally just carrying slabs of stone while running down a mountain. He gets partway, meets up with his assistant Joshua who says that there's a war and they need to go save the people and Moses corrects him saying: 'Nope, that's not war. That's a celebration.' Fully knowing that's even worse.

By the time Moses arrives in the camp everyone's already drunk in the middle of a major festival. Trying to hold Aaron to account on how he let this happen, true to the form of the garden of Eden Aaron passes the buck over to the people: 'they made me do it.' Sound familiar? Adam really set the standard on how to not take responsibility. 'We just threw the gold in the fire and out popped the calf.' Now he's not even blaming the people, he's blaming the calf for forming itself, or maybe he's blaming the fire for forming the calf. We're not sure who it is that is supposed to be taking the blame here, but it's definitely not supposed to be Aaron. Moses loses it, and smashes the commandments.

Why did he smash the Commandments? What is the first commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul. Do not make idols for yourselves. These are the first Commandments. They've already been broken before he even gets there. He smashes

them not just in a fit of rage but also to show the people what they've already done. They've already broken the Commandments and then he goes through to prove how heavy the weight of breaking those commandments really is. Thousands of people died and the Levitical priest ministry is born in that moment as they stand next to Moses and decide that they were going to stand for the law not against it. As the executors and executioners of it.

Moses wasn't just a guy with a temper who didn't like that people were partying without him. He understood the full gravity of what God was asking of the people and he understood the full gravity of the people's inability to do it naturally. He could see in that moment how complicated the whole story was going to be. His disappointment was overwhelming and took the form of rage. And then, he turns around, back up the mountain for another 40 days to get a new copy of the Commandments and give the people another chance to try and behave for just 40 days till he could arrive. Not that much to ask, but a big ask.

By the time Yeshua arrives on the scene, people are now slaves to the law itself. And he knows the whole story, he knows his own destiny, he knows what he's there to do. We often understand Palm Sunday as a celebration of recognizing him while he was alive, which didn't happen very often, as it is one of those rare moments where people honoured him. But it's also the moment he sealed his fate, and he knew it. There are 3-4 huge stories all happening in a very short span of time in the Mark passage about the procession of palms. We often don't realize that those stories are all sandwiched together.

I called the story 'the most human moment' because the story of the fig tree is the moment that Yeshua was the most human he ever was. It may seem simple, or it may seem excessive, but in the morning on his way down to Jerusalem he's hungry and wants breakfast, goes over and the tree has no fruit. One of the factors that many people don't realize, is that although the tree was in full leaf because it was spring, it wasn't actually the season for fruit yet. That would've been quite some time later and Yeshua would've known that. So he knew that there was no reason that there would be figs on the tree, the only reason for figs to be on the tree is if God had performed a miracle and provided them there because it would not have been natural. He was fully aware of all of this. And yet with no fruit being found he curses the tree that should not naturally have had fruit in the first place.

Some of his most important teachings all come from this moment. The first layer of his teachings is that a tree that bears no fruit serves no purpose. In that moment he's both telling his people what is the most important thing, fulfilling a ministry, but also telling them that busywork that bears no fruit is purposeless, although much of the faith that followed in his name ended up a lot of busy hands without actually working towards any goal. So in that moment, he's calling people out for busy work that is heartless.

A second layer of the teaching that comes out of the story with the fig tree happens on his return after he's been in Jerusalem for the procession and visited the temple, which by the way is when he throws the money changers table and clears out the yard calling them out for extorting the people. That's all on Palm Sunday.

On his return from town after his temper tantrum in the temple, the people then see that the tree that he cursed for not bearing fruit, even though it wasn't in season, has in fact shrivelled up and dead. It's been a very short period of time it should not have died and shrivelled that quickly, yet he said that it would and therefore it did. It was one of many miracles that caught their attention and proved who he was. He turns around and responds: with faith as small as a mustard seed you can move a mountain if you actually believed. Simultaneously he's calling them out for not really believing in what they're doing, and also telling them how to perform miracles.

In modern spirituality, there's a lot of attention on manifestation and it's all about your intention and focussing that energy. That's exactly what he saying here. He's telling you how to manifest, how to literally warp reality. But it's about faith. It's not about ego. It's not about bending it to your will. It's about having the faith that God will do it because it's the right thing to do. Because, remember at Gethsemane, a very short time later, he's always praying: 'Your will be done', which is what 'Amen' means. 'Please do this miraculous thing if it is Your will.' So those two teachings were paired together because they temper one another.

But why is this the most human moment? Because Yeshua knows that once he entered Jerusalem his death warrant was sealed. He knew what he was walking into, and he knew essentially the beginning of the end of his life was that day. He was fully aware, and yet he couldn't do anything to stop it. And so he did the most human thing there is to do - he projected all of his feelings onto that poor little tree that had nothing to do with the story.

Projection. Disowning your feelings, and finding a way to express them appropriately or inappropriately is what humans do. If he was only a divine being that happened to be in a human body but was just fully divine without that human element, he would've had no feelings about it. He would've gone through untouched, unscathed by the whole process. But he showed his pain. He showed his reluctance. He showed that he had feelings about the whole story.

That day he threw several temper tantrums, the first was at the fig where he took out the brunt of his feelings on it, the second was when he went into the temple and basically provided his last public sermon which was about the extortion of the church and how they took advantage of people. He only had four more days to live. This is Sunday morning by Thursday night he would be betrayed, and he knew that.

This is the moment that Yeshua proved that he was human. He had feelings, and he found ways to channel them so he can keep a clear head and keep doing his work not overwhelmed by the feelings, but having found a way to express them. In the fig tree event, the only witnesses were his close people in a moment as a way for him to express himself authentically, and also prove himself which they didn't realize until they were returning from town.

God brings peace to steady one's heart. This is one of the things that Yeshua taught us. In those moments where we feel overwhelmed by emotion, the Bible doesn't shame us out of having emotion. I don't know where that teaching came from. Yes we're supposed to be gentle and meek, but we're also not taught to deny our humanity, just our sinful nature that wants us to do things that get in the way of our relationship with God.

There are lots of examples of the prophets having feelings and dealing with them in very human ways. These stories are not presented to shame Yeshua for having a feeling when he should've maintained his composure, they are shared to show us how human he really was. God still considered him perfect. Let's try and remember that when you're feeling the stirrings of emotions you don't know how to deal with.

It's not about shoving it down and denying that it's there, it's about finding a way to hand it back over to God so you can find a productive way to deal with those emotions that are guiding your way. They're just pulling attention to things that are not right that God

wants you to correct or that are right for you that God wants you to pursue. God's peace used to be provided by surrendering to the law that gave you a way to live supported. But that law, though it was not abolished, it was fulfilled and Yeshua taught us the new way. He embodied the new way. And there were a whole lot of human feelings - big human feelings - involved in that embodiment.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Selah