

Human Animal, Human Spirit

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I was at a loss for a time about finding a theme to connect today's scriptures. What does the tale of David's lust for Bathsheba have to do with Paul's letter to the Ephesians urging them to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." And add the two miracles that Jesus does in the gospel of John, multiplying the loaves and fishes and walking on water. How could these hang together?

It is too facile to say, "Oh those uncouth warrior kings in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thank goodness Jesus came and saved us from our sinful nature." Oh? Did he really?

There is a fancy word, "supersessionism," which is "the belief that the Christian Church has replaced the Israelites as God's chosen people and that the Mosaic covenant has been replaced or superseded by the New Covenant." In other words, the Old Testament is the black and white silent movies and the New Testament is the full Technicolor action movies.

I don't think so. I started to ponder the expressions of being a human being. Let's call them, Human Animal and Human Spirit. Human Animal would be the realm of automatic behavior connected to survival and getting what you want when you want it and stepping over others, sneering, judging without kindness and all those not so nice ways we can be. Not all bad; it is important to have automatic responses. They take no effort; they're *automatic*. And they can save our lives.

On the other hand, we have to rise to Human Spirit. We must go past the easy and automatic to generate a very different way of living and sometimes, this lasts only for a moment because it takes intention and commitment to express Spirit.

These realms are not cut and dry in the Testaments. We see Human Spirit in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures and Human Animal is alive and well in the New Testament, the Greek Scriptures.

What happens between the period of David's warrior world one thousand sixty years before Paul's letter to the Ephesians with his instructions to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"?

If you peruse the ten chapters prior to 2 Samuel 11, the battles and bloodshed and loss of human life present scenes that take their place right next to "The Hurt Locker" and "American Sniper."

Let's get some back story. After Saul dies, David mourns for him and his son, Jonathan, with great sorrow. David is made King of Judah and one of Saul's sons, Ishbaal, becomes the King of Israel. Then we have a war between the house of Saul and house of David; the Hatfields and McCoys are at it.

I challenge you to follow this without your mind wandering. Ishbaal, son of Saul, King of Israel, insults Abner, king of another tribe, by accusing him of bad behavior. Abner was an ally of the house of Saul against David. After this insult, however, Abner switches his allegiance to David and they become allies. Ishbaal kills Abner but David honors Abner, his former enemy and short-term ally. A couple of David's soldiers kill Ishbaal and bring his head (the favorite evidence of an enemy's death), to David with much pride. David promptly kills the messengers/killers of Ishbaal whom David did not view as an enemy.

The head spins.

Before David spots Bathsheba and thinks, Yum Yum, he shows himself to be a just man and a just ruler, and even a king who is willing to abase himself before God, an expression of Human Spirit; humbling oneself does not come *automatically*. When David brings the Ark holding the 10 Commandments finally to Jerusalem, he dances with great joy and abandon. His wife, Michal, despises David for this unreserved display but he says to her: "Not only will I make merry before the Lord, but I will demean myself even more. I will be lowly in your esteem."

Then there is more Quentin Tarentino action with David slaughtering enemies and doing nasty things to horses.

Lest we think we have figured David out as the animal he truly is, he then exhibits Human Spirit when he searches for a way to honor the house of

Saul. He takes into his household Jonathan's crippled son and gives him his grandfather Saul's inheritance. At this time, this was extraordinary behavior by a conquering king.

I offer these head-spinning shifts to show that the change from Human Animal to Human Spirit and back again can take place in moments. This has been going on a very long time. No one is only Animal or Spirit.

At this point, we have today's story. By this time, David is getting used to his power. Maybe he's a little bored. Human Animal is usually loud and demands immediate attention and action. David gives in completely and is grabbed by his gonads. Bathsheba is a definite Yum Yum and he must have her. David uses his power to bed Bathsheba who becomes pregnant. Dear, dear, what to do.

Human Spirit is nowhere to be found. David figures he will tell Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, whom David has called back from the latest battle, to go and enjoy an interlude with his wife. David will then be off the hook and Uriah will appear to be the father of David's child. It should all work out fine, says Human Animal David.

The problem is that Uriah is an honorable man and he refuses to enjoy himself while his officers cannot. Human Spirit is guiding Uriah who stays with his officers at the front of the palace, *protecting the king*. So then David arranges for Uriah to be at the front of the next battle so he will get killed and David can marry Bathsheba.

It really stinks. David sinks way down beneath the tar pit with this, using up pretty much all of his reserve of the Lord's good will and going into major debt.

Ephesians

Fast forward 1060 years. Paul is in prison and it's about 63 A.D. In this beautiful letter he addresses not only the Ephesian church but the worldwide church. Traditionally always separated, Jews and Gentiles are both now included, Paul declares, in God's household. Gentiles had been "outside of God's chosen people and now you are brought in." "Christ has joined you together in himself," writes Paul (2:14).

Can it be that we have left the domination of Human Animal? But wait, didn't Saul preside over the execution of Stephen as he hunted down followers of the Way who had betrayed their Judaism? Wasn't that the same person? Yes and no. We may be beginning to uncover something interesting now.

What has happened? What Jesus has offered in himself is the possibility of conversion from Human Animal to Human Spirit, and not by accident or circumstances. It is what happens to Saul who becomes Paul. We don't have the elimination of Human Animal. No, we still have to deal with that. Paul still had to deal with Saul. But after Jesus, Human Animal never has to have the last word. Never.

I had a visceral experience of one of those who were far apart being brought closer to others. This was in seminary. At Union Seminary, chapel services were Monday through Thursday from noon to 12:30. Could be strobe lights or traditional Episcopal Eucharist or liturgical dancers or long periods of silence. One time, one of the students, a lovely Korean dancer, brought lengths of cord and in silence, indicated that the 25 or 30 of us were each to take the end of one cord. This dancer was very beautiful and very quiet, and she sat in the center of James Chapel holding the ends of all the cords.

Everyone was about 20 feet away from her, surrounding her. Very, very slowly and with ethereal grace, she began to pull each cord, still attached to a person, toward her, one after the other. We didn't know what was happening. We hung on to our cords, however, and followed them and began to come closer and closer to her and to each other. This went on for a good 10-15 minutes, all in silence.

"Being rooted and grounded in love." What does that look like on the ground? Feeding people not because they are allies in a battle or have done you some service but feeding people who may not be deserving at all, but are hungry, period. This is a new context. This is not language in David's time and neither is the idea of "having an inner life" or growing up spiritually. That was not imagined in the former times.

Earlier in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "We used to live according to the flesh (Human Animal), following impulses (David), by

nature children of wrath.” “[God] gave some as apostles, others as prophets...until we all attain to the unity of faith...so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery.”

Well, Paul, we still have human trickery and we are still very much children of wrath. What Christ brings us, though, is the teaching and modeling of love that has no reason, no because, no “in order to” something. It just is. It self-generates. It is not based in reaction to another. Human Animal is alive and well after Christ’s life, death and resurrection but that does not have to be the end of the story.

Just the other day, I was talking on the phone to a customer representative at a local bank. Suddenly I got this tone in my voice, this snarky tone, and I could hear it and she could hear it. There was no reason for it. She was asking me a question. I debated the next day about whether to call and apologize for that tone but decided against it. I did call her and asked for her boss’ name so I could write a note praising her. She did solve my problem. Human Animal. Repentance. Action. Reformation.

My friends, the good GOOD news is that Human Spirit has been named and its name is love. Unconditional Love. We must rise to that; it is not automatic.

To those who love him, Christ offers the possibility of growth, renewal, dying to the old self, living into a new self, forgiveness and reconciliation. Human Spirit has a fighting chance to show up in a moment because we ask for and receive divine support through Jesus Christ. We have a model, a helper, a companion, a coach.

We have an interior life that can be developed. The possibility of being not a hero as in the Old Testament which had heroes and villains. Christ has opened the door for us to be saints, to be sanctified. To become more Christ-like.

We still have to deal with Human Animal and accept that expression as part of us. We can shift to Human Spirit consciously and humbly. That possibility is what is marvelous about our Jesus.

AMEN