

February 8, 2009
Dr. Bruce Humphrey

Jesus—In Jeans and Plaid Shirt?
Isaiah 53:1-3 and Philippians 2: 5-8

“He emptied himself, taking the nature of a servant” Phil. 2:7

“He appeared Middle Eastern and was dressed like a laborer, complete with tool belt and gloves. He stood easily, leaning against the door jamb with arms crossed in front of him, wearing jeans covered in wood dust and a plaid shirt with sleeves rolled above the elbows, revealing well muscled forearms. His features were pleasant enough, but he was not particularly handsome...” *The Shack*, p. 84.

Have you heard that later this month we have Lance Armstrong and a group of bicyclists riding past our church on Sunday morning? I am thinking of joining them with my electric bike. Some of you know that I ride an electric bicycle to and from work. It is perfect for our community.

I must admit that reactions are mixed. My wife talked me into it. Kate liked it way better than my suggestion that maybe I should get a motorcycle to save on gas. Pastor Neal teased me about looking geeky on it. Actually, a lot of people made comments similar to Neal’s. Believe me I have been very aware of the geekiness factor. When we assembled it, Kate tried to talk me into putting the front basket on it—“you can carry stuff in it”—that’s when I took my stand. “No way! I am not riding a bicycle with a little white wicker basket on the front. It is bad enough that the horn sounds like I ran over a clown. If I’m going green to reduce my carbon footprint, I at least want to hold onto some of my masculine pride. I’m wearing a cool helmet and leather jacket.”

So, I had been riding the bicycle for about two weeks, trying to feel cool and macho on this little thing, when one morning a member of the church staff pulled me aside. “Bruce, you are wearing your helmet backwards.” I turned the helmet around and it fit way better!

If you have been visiting our church since we started this series on *The Shack*, by now you have probably picked up that I don’t take myself too seriously. I share some pretty vulnerable things that remind our congregation I am human like everybody else. I avoid letting our congregation put me on a pedestal.

I hate it when we put leaders on a pedestal. A few years ago he was just another graduate student, spending his first night in the city sleeping in an alley looking for a place to stay. I bet none of us knew his name. Then on January 20th we inaugurated him President of our nation. Now, if we are not careful, we will do to President Obama what we tend to do with most leaders, assume that his title makes him different from the rest of us. We’ll develop unrealistic expectations. We will “dehumanize” him.

The dictionary defines *dehumanize* as “to divest of human qualities.” The connotation is that we treat others as less than human. For instance, most Native American tribes call themselves their own word for “the people.” Their words for everyone else outside their own tribe generally mean something like “the less-than-humans.” When the first white people met the tribes of northern Arizona they asked one tribe what they were called. The answer was “Dinee” which meant “the people.” When the white people asked another tribe they learned the other tribe’s name meant “the thieves”—“Navajo.”

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Most of the time we dehumanize others by putting them below us. However, it is possible to dehumanize someone by considering him so far above us that we can't relate to him. Is our President too far above us for us to relate to him? Do we put pastors on a pedestal, assuming God listens to their prayers more than the rest of us? If we are not careful, we can dehumanize Jesus in this way. I love the way *The Shack* invites us to consider the ways we may have dehumanized Jesus.

One of my favorite scenes with Jesus in the book *The Shack* is the one where Jesus drops a bowl in the kitchen. As the bowl breaks and the contents splatter all over Papa, Jesus, and Sarayu—they burst into laughter. The Holy Spirit lovingly teases Jesus about humans being clumsy. They laugh together as Jesus kneels and wipes up the mess, particularly taking time not only to wipe off the feet of Papa, but he turns it into a foot washing ceremony complete with a brief foot massage.

Does Jesus laugh at himself? Let's explore the humanity of Jesus.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Frank Harrington, former pastor of the largest Presbyterian congregation in America—Peachtree Presbyterian with 11,000 members—used to tell the story about the day his wife asked him to rake the leaves in their yard. “Sarah, do you realize you are asking the Senior Pastor of the largest Presbyterian Church in the country to rake leaves?” “Well, Frank, you can wear your robe if you want to, but you are still going to rake the leaves.”

When Jesus agreed to come be the Savior of the human race, did he need to dress in some fancy holy robe so everybody would know who he was? What does the Bible mean when it says Jesus “emptied himself”?

If we don't explore the meaning of “empty” we will only see Jesus as God the Son, our Savior and Lord. Yes, we learned a few weeks ago that the mystery of the Trinity is that Jesus is fully God with the father and the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God. We hold Jesus' divinity as important. However, if we emphasize his divinity too much we will dehumanize Jesus and keep him above humanity. The Bible says clearly that he emptied himself and became fully human.

The word for “empty” means to pour out all the contents until there is nothing left. When our granddaughter wants me to give her more juice to drink, she brings her cup to me. She repeats the word “empty.” “Bapa, it's empty.” Then to prove that she

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has finished her drink and needs more, she tips the cup upside down to show that there is nothing left to drip out. "Empty."

"Empty" is the word the Bible uses to show how much of God Jesus kept inside. When Jesus came to earth he emptied himself. He became fully human. The only filling of God he had in his life was what he asked for the same way we ask for God to be in our lives today.

When we say that Jesus was fully human, we mean Jesus only had as much of God's resources as any of us have access to God's resources. Jesus had to ask for the Holy Spirit the same way we ask for the Holy Spirit. He could do only what an ordinary human being can do with God's help.

Most of us struggle with this truth from the Bible. We tend to assume that Jesus somehow kept part of his God nature and was not entirely empty. We point to the miracles as examples that he did those because he was God. We doubt when he tells us that we can do the same things he did. If we can do the same things he did, then we realize how much more he trusted God than we do. Instead of accepting the challenge to grow our faith and live like Jesus, we fall back on the idea that Jesus must not be like us.

Let's review a few of the key human moments in Jesus' life.

At twelve years old Jesus was asking questions and failed to communicate with his parents where he was. Was that a sin? No, it just means he was a normal twelve-year-old boy. If he had remained God, he would have known they were worried and made a point of letting them know his whereabouts. God would have known better. A twelve-year-old didn't know. He had to learn.

Shortly after being filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus felt so hungry that he was tempted to turn stones into bread. He was tempted to test his new Holy Spirit filling by throwing himself off the temple to see if God would protect him. He wished he could solve the world's political problems by forcing everybody to do what was right. Like us, he realized that you can't legislate morality. Even Jesus couldn't force people to love their neighbors.

Jesus was concerned that Judas might betray him. Jesus was so upset that evening in the garden of Gethsemane that he sweats drops like blood and begged that if there was any other way for God to accomplish salvation that the cup would pass from him.

Let's be honest. Some of us have doubts about the humanity of Jesus. We think Jesus must have held onto some part of being God while he was on earth. We tend to think of God as stern and sober and thus our image of Jesus is usually of a Savior who lived a stern life of discipline. It is this image that *The Shack* challenges us to explore.

Have you gotten to the scene where Mack admits that he expected Jesus to be better looking? "I guess I expected you to be... uh... well, humanly striking." Jesus responds, "It's my nose, isn't it." Then Jesus bursts into laughter.

Later that evening they are lying on the dock gazing up at the stars. Again, Mack comments on Jesus' humanity. "Sometimes you sound so, I mean, here I am lying next to God Almighty and, you really sound, so..." "Human?" Jesus offered. "But ugly." And with that he began to chuckle, quietly and restrained at first, but after a couple of snorts, laughter simply started tumbling out."

Are we comfortable with a laughing Jesus? Not just a small polite smile, but an outright guffaw. Can you picture Jesus laughing so hard that milk comes out his nose and he snorts? That's my Jesus!

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I suspect Jesus wants us to get him down off the pedestal. “Jesus is so high and mighty he can’t relate to my ordinary life.” I suspect he aches to have us see him not only as our Savior and Lord but also as a friend. Along with our images of Jesus high and mighty, robed as the King of kings and Lord of lords, we can picture him in jeans and a plaid shirt?