

“Simply Human in Times of Chaos” by Jeanne Marcus



July 7, 2024

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Last week, during our time together, we celebrated an important anniversary: it was 20 years ago last week that we moved from our first home at 2025 Massachusetts Avenue to our space here on Carroll Street. Our celebration provided us a

wonderful opportunity for us all to hear our community's stories together—whether we were remembering what we lived through back then, or have come to Seekers since that time, and were hearing now the challenges and set-backs that we can laugh at now, and the expansive happiness of the times that things all were functioning beautifully.

Now, on the first Sunday of what-comes-next, we open our hearts and spirits to what is here today: Seekers Church has changed in the last 20 years; but the world around us has changed even more dramatically. Though we don't yet know our path, we do know that in large part, we'll make the path by walking. May Christ's presence be always with us as we walk.

So starting out together: I'd like to pick up our Theme for this Trinity Season—the ambiguous line, “Only Human?” and then also to look again at our reflection paragraph.

This little phrase, “Only human?” has been rolling around in my head and heart spirit these past weeks. And slowly, it's turned into an uplifting mantra for me, that sounds like this:

“Only human!

Simply human!

Completely human!

That's ALL I want or need to be!

And it's more than enough.”

and even as I started to write that last paragraph, it generated a tsunami wave of gratitude that moved me off my seat with the need to move around with it. And a melody from some pop song from when my kids were teens came to me, just a

endless round of

“Thank you, Thank you!

“Thank you, thank you!

“Thank you, thank you!”

On and on: like an uncorked bottle of champagne fizzing over. It was like a concentrated elixir of many psalms of thanksgiving, and poems of thanksgiving, all at once. It felt as if my synapses were overloading.

Like Rumi reminds us, there are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground; there are a million moments of human-ness to celebrate. Some are highlights of a lifetime: I think of the moment when I delivered my firstborn: and later when I first got to hold him.

Birthing him, I was so aware of everything happening in my body: Meeting this new being that I'd been sheltering and nourishing; seeing him, smelling him, feeling his skin against mine.

But it can also be the smallest of everyday moments: for instance, yesterday. I am not a morning person, and I mostly struggle out of bed with some reluctance. But my dog, as old as she is, greets me each morning with the utmost enthusiasm. She's happy and she knows it, and she wriggles around on her back in utter delight, and later darts around from one room to another like a puppy at a dog park.

Being only human is enough. It's more than enough. God is giver of good gifts, and I am thankful!

From there, I'd like to turn attention to the reflection paragraph. It reminds us that the treasure of God's light within us, including the joy of being human, is something we only hold in clay pots. Paul wants us to be clear that this awesome spiritual energy isn't about any efforts of ours, or

any innate worthiness. We are limited: we aren't immortal, our powers are far from infinite. Our embodied life is impermanent: we age, we weaken, and we ultimately die. We are vulnerable, sometimes physically: we become ill, we fall and suffer injury.

We are vulnerable in our hearts and souls as well; we are inwardly affected by cruelty and by exclusions, by neglects and abandonments; by threats and hatreds and oppressions. And when we are connected to others by love or compassion, we are also affected when injuries and cruelties happen to those we care for.

Sometimes entire communities suffer vulnerability, injuries or trauma in common: in destructive flooding or earthquakes; in times of war. But what seems new to me is the wide extent of common traumas and perils that multitudes of individuals are facing at once. There are so many of these common perils and conditions now, that we often collapse or compress them into a judgment that "the world is falling apart."

The first common trauma that comes to mind for me and many others is climate change. But we're also holding the other signs of human overuse of earth's resources, and how we've overwhelmed the earth's capacity to deal with the waste substances from the way we live.

None of this is actually separated from another common trauma: our runaway capitalist economic system. It is ever increasingly structured to benefit a global elite of billionaires, while millions of persons, here in the U.S., and around the world, are unemployed or earning so little that they cannot maintain a minimal standard of living; countless numbers are homeless and hungry.

With their increased economic power comes increased political power at all levels; governments respond to the agendas of billionaires and multinational corporations.

There are social media deliberately designed to drive apart citizens that could be working together to address our common challenges; and lifting up scapegoats to blame, taking our attention away from the true sources of our largest problems. There is an increase of extremist racism, antisemitism, and a right-wing takeover of a significant segment of American Christian churches. There are wars and rumors of war. And as I was writing this, a handful of Supreme Court rulings, and new developments in the Presidential race were specifically on my mind.

Turning back to our reflection reading then, I read:

We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out.

Honestly: there are more than a few times that I have felt just the negative parts of the pairings: As is the writer of this epistle, I AM aware of an entire range of troubles, but they can and do sometimes feel crushing. I do get confused; and I can get depressed; and I can feel knocked down, deflated, demoralized.

And this is the deal with emotions: if you are going to be open to really experiencing your positive emotions, you're going to be open to experiencing more of your uncomfortable emotions as well. I've found truth in the guidance not to hide from feeling into one's emotions, but to fully have them. Have them, but then don't invite them to sit down and stay for tea.

Naming all these concerns could be mostly preaching to the choir here. Others have pointed out the truth of our increasingly precarious future. It can be a painful and sometimes overwhelming truth to be holding. But holding this awareness doesn't have to keep us from continuing to be fully

present to the beauty and joy of life in a human body. Awareness of both at the same time can be a very tender and painfully sweet experience.

As I said earlier, I have been pondering what all this might mean in relation to Seekers Church going forward. I've been thinking about what the years ahead will hold, when the dissolution around us seems to be developing so rapidly. The first gatherings during this time just after celebrating our milestone last week could be the perfect time to look forward and ponder the possibilities together.

A few weeks ago, Kolya offered something briefly about Refugia—areas where a group of organisms survive during adverse environmental conditions. I was intrigued by that image, and wondered about what that image of a Refugia could offer as a vision of what a small church could be in a time of catastrophe.

There is much that we will not be able to control in an increasingly chaotic and challenging world: there will be things we love that we won't be able to save: a beloved coastline or ecosystem, or areas of a city we know well, or beautiful lifeforms whose habitat has become inhospitable.

We may not be able to save the normal operations of a familiar political system. And we won't be able to control others around us to assure a culture of civility, rather than a culture built on animosity and aggression.

But we can control our inner world, doing the spiritual work necessary for remaining sane, kind-hearted, and generous. And we can still keep alive our ability to celebrate the beauty that will remain around us. This is to create the Realm of God within ourselves.

And, we can make choices about staying together in community, and even deepening our ways of belonging to each other. From that deep rootedness as a community of commitment and love, we

could be Refugia for others, an island of sanity, beauty, peace, healing and caring support. even if, even as, the world is falling apart.

I don't imagine that being Refugia in a world of chaos, desperation and peril will be an easy thing to create and keep intact. A story that has returned to mind from time to time over the years is the prophecy of the warriors of Shambhala. Here is a version of the story that I first heard:

The prophecy states that when all life on Earth is in danger, and the future of sentient life hangs by the frailest of threads, the kingdom of Shambhala emerges. You cannot tell who its warriors are by their appearance; they look like normal people. Their weapons are compassion and insight. Well-trained in their use, they go into the world to dismantle the beliefs and behaviors that are destroying life. ... Perhaps you are curious to see what this prophecy might mean ...[It means that] We are free to choose a new role for ourselves, to transform our grief, outrage, frustration and exhaustion into the skills of insight and compassion, to serve this dark time as warriors for the human spirit.

I don't know what that would look like; likely we can't really know until the times are more fully upon us. But it does seem that even now, we can discern our way toward what we might be called to be and do in these darkening times. We could, even now, build up our wisdom and compassion muscles, and begin putting into practice whatever we have been able to discern. Whatever we are able to do and become will be through the light of God shining within us, these amazing fragile, simply human earthen pots that we are.