

From the Pastor's Desk

Divinely Human

Perhaps you have looked in the mirror and found yourself surprised at what you saw. A little more gray hair, a wrinkle or two that you hadn't noticed before, and the mole that seemed to have appeared overnight. Aches and pains become more noticeable. Sitting in a chair too low to the ground makes standing up difficult. And your memory may not be as sharp as it used to be. Hearing can also become a problem as we age. It's like the 84 year old man who went to his doctor for a physical. A few days later his doctor saw him walking down the street with a gorgeous young woman on his arm. The next time his doctor saw him he asked how he was doing. "Great," said the old guy. "I did just what you told me: 'Get a hot momma and be cheerful.'" "I didn't say that," said the doctor. "I said, 'You've got a heart murmur and be careful.'"

It is odd that we find ourselves surprised as we watch our bodies age. Throughout our lives we have watched other people age, our parents, grand parents and others, but didn't pay too much attention to ourselves growing older, until the first gray hair and wrinkles become apparent. I wonder if that's because the person looking through your eyes at the mirror is different than the image you see in the mirror. In other words, there are two entities present, one looking through your eyes at the mirror, and the other is the image you see in the mirror. That's why we are surprised at what we see when we age. Looking through your eyes is your soul, an ageless spirit who will live on in eternity regardless of what happens to your physical body. Your soul or spirit is surprised to see your body age because it is ageless.

If you have ever been seriously sick, you may have had a similar encounter. In 1997, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had my prostate surgically removed. I didn't find that to be an overly traumatizing experience. What I did find traumatizing were the complications after the surgery. I left the hospital with suction tubes embedded in the surgical site that were supposed to be removing residue blood, but sadly they began filling up with urine. The urologist was convinced that the stitches on the urethra tube had become undone and I would need to return to surgery. In the meantime, other tests were scheduled.

I felt fear about what the future might hold and in the midst of all this had a strange experience. I felt some kind of detachment occurring from my body. I began to see my body as an object that would need to be worked on, kind of like having a car repaired. My body became more objectified and I was no longer identifying it with "me". I had just a glimpse of this while in the doctor's office as the bad news was being delivered. During this trying time, another entity had become apparent to me, which I believe was my ageless soul / spirit observing the unfortunate condition of my body. Thankfully, the situation remedied itself as a cystogram found the stitches still in place. People who have had near-death experiences report similar stories, although they're often much more dramatic.

Some people would call this psychological nonsense having no basis in reality. Yet, our scriptures proclaim: *Do you not know that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you that you have received from God?* (1 Corinthians 3:16) *You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.* (Romans 8:9) *Because we are sons and daughters, God has sent his Spirit into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* (Galatians 4:6)

Most of us tend to be heretics when it comes to our understanding of who Jesus was when he walked on the earth 2000 years ago. We say, "Jesus was divine", but technically that's not true. During Jesus' earthly life, he was the *union* of the human and the divine. Notice what the Nicene Creeds says of Jesus: *He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.* Jesus shows us what God looks like in human form and what God's priorities are: Compassion, forgiveness, concern for poor and oppressed people, and challenging societal structures that keep them that way. As followers of the Master, we seek to do the same.

How many of you view yourself as the incarnation of God in your particular situation in life? It is easier to say Jesus was the incarnation of God, bow our heads in prayer for a few moments and then move on with our lives. This gets us off the hook from taking our faith seriously and seeing that each one of us can be a witness to the incarnation of God in our society by allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through us.

Author and pastor Richard Rohr puts it this way in his book "Falling Upward": *We can profess our creeds but so what? It's no skin off our backs to believe things about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But allowing God's divine life to flow through us is where the rubber meets the road on our Christian journey.*

If we just stay on the fearful or superficial side of the religious spectrum, religion is invariably defined by exclusionary purity codes that always separate things into sacred and secular. God is still distant, punitive, and scary. Then our religious job becomes putting ourselves only on the side of "sacred" things (as if you could) and staying apart from secular or worldly things, even though Jesus shows no such preference in himself.

Incarnation means sacred and secular, flesh and Spirit working together. When this happens, the sacred and secular become one. Rohr puts it this way: *It is not like the sacred is here and the secular is over there. Everything is secular if you live on the surface of it. And everything is sacred if you go into the depths of it, even your sin. To go inside your own mistakenness is to find God.*

Because of our human weaknesses, it is difficult to perceive our inner Godliness. But, the beauty of Christianity is that God works through our human weakness, which is the whole point of Incarnation. Worshipping together as a Christian community reminds us that we are already "Divinely Human", where we are fed with holy food to nurture our humanity, and then are sent into the world to act accordingly.