

January 2, 2011: ACCESS  
Jeremiah 31:7-14, John 1:1-18; Psalm 147:12-20  
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This is the time of year when we resolve to live better lives. As if to compensate for the excesses of the holidays, the calendar's fresh start heartens us to attempt a fresh start on those things about ourselves we'd like to improve. Resolutions to lead more healthy lives are such a part of popular culture that *The Oregonian's* health and wellness section this week ran an article making it patriotic to resolve to take better care of your health. Since you are sitting in church listening to me preach, however, you won't object to my saying that taking care of your health is more faithful than patriotic. *The Oregonian* was all about taking personal responsibility for your health not just to feel better but to cut health care costs for everyone. I'm telling you there are good and compelling theological reasons for taking responsibility for your health. Mostly it's today's gospel lesson, but Jeremiah adds his own two-cents to the topic: it's all about the Incarnation.

In ancient times, humans believed that gods took on human form in order to "have their way with" beautiful maidens. Their motives were greed, lust, or a simple desire to play tricks on humans. The God of the Hebrews was an exception. This God was so transcendent, so Other, that no images whatsoever were tolerated. It should come as a huge surprise, then, that this particular God would actually have a birthday we could celebrate. Not only that, but *this* God had strange, compassionate motives for becoming a full-fledged human, not just taking on the form. No wonder the Church struggles with what it means for God to be human, to remain God and *not* cause more harm than good. For centuries the Church struggled to suppress heresies that tried to make sense of this. These heresies offered theological understandings about dual and separate natures, but their denominational offices have long since closed. *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Celestine Prophecy* and *The Last Templar* are best-selling proof that they haven't been entirely wiped out yet, that many of us still harbor those unrecognized theologies in our hearts. An epidemic of obesity, aided and abetted by sedentary living, is testament to our continuing ambivalence toward the earthly/ material world. We call it "cyber space" and "virtual reality" but it's the modern version of the perceived superiority of the spiritual realm. Our divided loyalties are not very different from tenth century dualistic or Gnostic heresies.

The bottom line of the Incarnation, that which we say we celebrate at Christmas, is that God made sacred the material world by becoming part of it. Genesis tells us that God saw all that had been created and saw that it was *very good*. At some point it became clear that humans weren't going to be convinced of that unless God himself actually entered the material world. Maybe God always knew we were going to think, "have dominion over" meant "use it up and pillage for personal use." We use and discard our own bodies as if they were consumer goods. It's only when we hear the shocking words of the diagnosis, that we realize what a precious treasure our flesh really is. We become victims

of our bodies, freefall into physical laziness, and stop being proactive about our health, so that the newspaper has to tell us it's an act of patriotism to give up thinking that, by changing the color of our pills, we can avoid having to exert conscious choices about what we eat or how much we exercise.

God became human, thus declaring forever and all eternity that the human body is sacred and where God-in-person hangs out. God became human, knowing that if we humans don't drink anything for 3 days we die, that we get dirty and need washing. And God reminds us of this in the waters of our baptisms—of our need for cleansing, of our essential thirst for the sacred as well as the material. God became human, knowing that humans thrive on mother's milk as infants and need to eat good, solid, nutritious food to grow and fuel our bodies. The God who made all the rich and exotic and tasty foods we so treasure this time of year, also gave us this simple Meal of bread and wine to remind us of the essential goodness of our needs met, our hungers sated, our loneliness undone in communion. God became human, experiencing our very human joy in celebration, the very ordinary-ness of human time so that we could get up, day after day and go to work and play with our kids and check up on our neighbors and weep with the sick and infirm and get married and lose things and give thanks even for that.

God became human so we would know: we are worth loving where we're at. God became human, and Right Now became sacred and holy. We don't have to wait to accomplish some great holy task. God already did that. The holiest task of all is that God put on the ordinary—flesh and blood. As you make your resolutions this year, will it be easier to lose weight or get fit or adopt a spiritual discipline or give up that annoying habit—will it be easier to keep those resolutions knowing what you do is a holy task because God treasured *your* incarnation enough to be incarnate? Will it be easier to treasure your own because of that?

That God became human is a scandal. What it says is that being human is honorable. It means that we are no more victims of our bodies than we are its owners. As Richard Rohr says, "We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking. In other words," he says, "our journeys around and through our realities . . . lead us to the core reality, where we meet both our truest self and our truest God. We do not really know what it means to be human unless we know the God who created this humanity in his own image. And in turn, we do not really know God except through our own broken and rejoicing humanity. . . . It seems that we Christians have been worshipping Jesus' journey instead of doing his journey. The first feels very religious; the second just feels human and not glorious at all."<sup>1</sup> That God became human is proof absolute that being human is sacred work.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [Everything Belongs](#), pp. 19-20