

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

September 28, 2014
Proper 21A/Ordinary 26A/Pentecost +16

The readings this week:

- Exodus 17:1-7 ◦ Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16
- Philippians 2:1-13 ◦ Matthew 21:22-32

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Limited

For centuries the church has talked—and argued—about the character of Jesus. After all, we say that he was the fullest expression of what God is like. And yet we also say that he was human in every way, just like us.

Just like God? Just like us? Which is it?

Here's Paul's take on it, probably quoting an early Christian hymn, as you can see from the poetic motion of the text:



Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. From Philippians 2

The essence of this faith is that the divine took on the human in order to gain us, and to teach us how to live.

The self-limiting of Jesus.

It's seen throughout the gospels, isn't it? One minute, we see Jesus performing great miracles. The next, we see him almost fumbling with his humanity, the way the rest of us do. Changing his mind about people, getting worn out, stressed by so much to do. Tired of those disciples he had to hang with all the time.

The holy takes on the ordinary. Jesus was often limited by the ordinary, choosing limitation over strength and power.

It is this ordinariness that is at the same time scandalous and appealing. The very Son of God

limited by the things that limit all the rest of us: time and space, living and dying, illness and health, the actions and expectations of others, good and bad relationships. Every day Jesus had to figure out how to get food, where they were going to sleep. Someone was in charge of the money. They had to figure out which road they were going to take to the next town and sometimes they were running late.

God chose not just to view the messiness that we call humanity from some other plane, but to enter this messiness and to be just as at home in it as not. The spiritual realm and the physical are so intertwined that they cannot be separated, not even in Christ. Neither is holier than the other. Each is made holier by the other.

Wouldn't it be something if we could see the intertwining of spirit and physicality today? We do, but in an even messier way than Jesus lived it: it is called the Church.

The church is the body of Christ. We worry sometimes that we are not spiritual enough. And we're probably right. But it's also likely that we are not mundane enough. Either without the other is not the body of Christ. The mundane must be infused with the spiritual, and the spiritual with the mundane.

This gets messy, and we make lots of mistakes trying to get it right. We're limited by our location, our resources, our personalities.

Jesus, too, chose to be limited.

That puts us in good company.

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Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

What is Israel's next stop on their way to the Promised Land? What were God's instructions to Moses? Where was he to go and what was he to do when he got there? According to God's statement in Exodus 17:6 where was God at Sinai and what happened when Moses obeyed God's orders? When did the people receive the gift of the water from the rock? BibleStudies.org and [Agape Bible Study](http://AgapeBibleStudy) The Israelites are still grumbling and are still in crisis, and again God provides. How has God provided for you in the midst of grumbling or crisis? Do you see a pattern of provision?

Psalm Reading: Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16

What responsibility do we as God's people have to the generations that come after us? Parents, what does it look like for you to teach your children "the glorious deeds of the LORD?" If you do not have children, what does it look like to play a part in helping tell of God's deeds to the next generation? In the wilderness, Israel doubted (v.20), forgot (v.11), and rejected God (vv.56-57). In what ways- whether large or small- are you tempted to do the same? Psalm 78 is a wonderful reminder that remembering who God is and what he has done is a community project. What truths about God and his works do you need to be reminded of this week? How can other believers assist you in this? Who can you help and how? [Providence Church](http://ProvidenceChurch)

Praying Toward Sunday

God of Heaven and Earth, God of the sunrise and the sunset, God of the highest mountain and the deepest valley, hear our prayers as we come before your throne of glory. Declare your message to us and grant us the courage to listen. May our listening turn to action. May our actions touch the hearts of those who need to hear your voice. We put our trust in you knowing that it is well placed in your gentle and caring hands.

Rev. Kim Gilliland



3rd Reading: Philippians 2:1-13

What is the difference between humility and a poor self-image? How can our experience of Christ and his Spirit help us to achieve the unity Paul desires in verse 2? How do verses 3-4 help us to understand the nature of humility? How did each of Christ's actions illustrate humility and a concern for the interests of others? In your own words, describe God's response to Jesus' humility. In verses 12-13 Paul says you are to "work out your salvation" because God "works in you." How are these ideas related? Who might you be tempted to impress during the next few days? What act of humble service could you do for this person instead? [Quiet Time Bible Study](http://QuietTimeBibleStudy), [InterVarsity Press](http://InterVarsityPress)

4th Reading: Matthew 21:22-32

Why do you think Jesus refused to answer the question of the chief priests and elders about the source of his authority? Would it have been helpful had he answered the question? If so who would have been helped? How does the parable of the two sons relate to the question of whether Jesus should answer the authority question posed by the chief priests and elders? For whom does Jesus ultimately have authority? What role does John the Baptist play in the two paragraphs (the question of authority and the parable of the two sons)? How did the combination of the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist create a problem for the chief priests? What warning of spiritual danger is there for us in the problem they had with Jesus and John? [The Voice](http://TheVoice)

Psalm 78: The Jealous Kind

i'll tell you what i know
but i must warn you up front
it's not exactly suitable
for children.

i've met this one you call
god, the seductive voice in
the wilderness
that blows your mind with
wonders,
feeding your every craving
with the promise of
glorious redemption.

it's all fine of course until
your inevitable misstep, you
know i'm
a merciful god but do you
realize just
how many times i've
forgiven
your iniquity, how often i've
restrained my wrath, how
close
i've come to unleashing this
pent-up fury upon you?

oh, i know this voice all too
well, the one that whispers
i'm so sorry but you knew i
was
the jealous kind when
you signed on the line but
it's ok now don't cry, yes
you've taken your
punishment
but now i'm taking you back
my one and only
love.

~ [Yedid Nefesh](http://YedidNefesh), by
[Rabbi Brant Rossen](http://RabbiBrantRossen)

