

Infinite Empathy

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff began Sunday's sermon with a story about first-century Jewish mothers with bumper stickers on their donkeys. One bumper sticker bragged, "My son is a scribe." Another bragged, "My son is a Rabbi." But Mary's bumper sticker took the prize. Hers said, "My son is God." What's one of the best, or most annoying, bumper stickers you've seen?
2. On Sunday we continued our sermon series based on the famous Christmas prophecy found at Isaiah 9:6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . , and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Our focus on Sunday was on the idea that the Messiah would himself be "Mighty God." Other Scriptures echo this same stunning claim. For example, read Matthew 1:18-25, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In a moment we'll discuss the significance of Jesus being "God with us." But before we dive into that, what do you think we're meant to learn from Joseph's example in this passage?
3. Matthew says Joseph should name his child "Jesus" and that Jesus would come to be regarded as "Emmanuel." "Jesus" is the English transliteration of the Hebrew name "Yeshua," which means Deliverer. Yeshua was an Old Testament title for God. Even more explicitly, though, Matthew says that Jesus would come to be regarded as "Emmanuel," which means God with us.
 - a. What are some of the reasons why God might have found it necessary to become one of us?
 - b. Aristotle described God as an "Unmoved Mover." To Aristotle, the Unmoved Mover is perfectly beautiful and, to maintain that perfection, needs to remain detached and engages only in self-contemplation. When you hear God described that way, how does it sit with you? What do you like or not like about seeing God as an Unmoved Mover?
 - c. When in your life has God felt most like an Unmoved Mover to you? In other words, when have you felt most remote and detached from God?
4. According to the Bible, God is the opposite of an Unmoved Mover. According to the Bible, God is so completely invested in our human plight that God dared to become one of us. Read Philippians 2:5-8, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Based on what verse 6 says, what was Jesus' state of being before his birth? In other words, describe what you envision Jesus' existence in heaven was like?
 - b. Verse 7 says Jesus "emptied" himself to become a human. "Emptied" himself of what? How was Jesus different on earth than he had been in heaven?

- c. Jeff compared Jesus' decision to become a human to what it would be like for us to give up our human privileges to become a dog. Imagine yourself having to be a dog for a year. Brainstorm a list of some of the human privileges you would have to give up.
 - d. Suppose you woke up tomorrow morning and found yourself to be a dog. How would you feel? To you, what would be the worst thing about being a dog?
 - e. As a human infant, do you think Jesus was aware of his divine identity and pre-existence? If not, when and how do you think he awakened to his identity and mission?
5. Jeff said, "Because of his experience as an authentic human, Jesus now knows – not in the abstract, but through direct lived experience – what it feels like to be sick and puke your guts out, or to lose a loved one, or to experience the pain of romantic heartbreak, or to be different, or to be rejected, or to be afraid."
- a. A person who gets cancer gains a much deeper understanding of what it means to have cancer than they ever could have without living the experience. As a result, they're able to walk alongside others who get cancer in a profound empathic way. Think about something you've gone through in life that has given you a much deeper understanding of what it means to go through it. How did that experience change or deepen you and your ability to relate to others going through the same experience?
 - b. Think of something difficult or traumatic you've been through. Tell us what that was and what it means to you to know that Jesus experienced something quite comparable while here on earth.
6. When Jeff once assured someone that Jesus knew what she was feeling, she said, "There's no way Jesus knows what it feels like to be me because Jesus never sinned. He may have been tempted, but he never yielded to temptation. So he doesn't know the degradation, devastation and shame of moral failure." In response, Jeff pointed her to Isaiah 53:4-6. Read that passage, as printed on p. 3.
- a. Note the phrase, "the Lord has laid on him [i.e., the Messiah] the iniquity of us all." In other words, while on the cross, in some deep mystical sense, Jesus absorbed into himself all the shame, devastation, and penalty for every sin ever committed. During those moments, Jesus became the ultimate empath. Using your imagination, how would you describe what it must have felt like for Jesus to absorb all those sins while he was on the cross?
 - b. What do you regard as one of your greatest moral failures? What does it mean to you to know that Jesus knows exactly what your failure feels like?

Reminders: (1) Candlelight Christmas Eve Service on December 24 at 7:00 pm at the church; and (2) Christmas Potluck Dinner on Sunday December 26 at 12:30 pm. Dinner reservations are required and can be made at LifeJourney.church/links.

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God with us." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Philippians 2:5-8

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Isaiah 53:4-6

⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our
iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and
by his bruises we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.