

Blazing the Trail
Hebrews 2:10-18, Mark 3:13-19
The First United Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights
March 4, 2007
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So. "The Lost Tomb of Jesus". Have you seen any of the hype for this? The Discovery Channel is presenting a program this evening that will document what claims to be the bones of Jesus of Nazareth, along with other members of his family. This so-called "news" will explore a tomb first discovered when Jimmy Carter was President of the United States and attempt to say that the bones inside the tomb are those of Jesus, whom we worship as the Christ.

Is that good news?

Let me push you a little bit and suggest that at least in one way, it is good news. The fact of the matter is that Jesus had bones. He was human.

I know, I know we make a big deal about this, especially at Christmastime. We talk about the baby Jesus. Sweet little holy child – we didn't know who you was... Often times when we talk about Jesus being a human being, it's in the context of him being born in Bethlehem. Somehow, we tolerate aspects of our humanity better in a baby than we do in grown-ups. Babies are cute.

Human beings are not always cute.

You've got a little baby, sitting in your lap, and she lets out a deep low rumble through the diapers and then gets a smile on her face, well, everyone just smiles and says, "Oh my! Did our little sweetheart just toot?" It's endearing, right?

Well, let me tell you this. You're sitting at a wedding and your dad, your girlfriend, or your great-aunt Martha lets one rip during the exchanging of the vows, and then looks around the room and smiles broadly, it's not cute. Isn't that the case? So many of the basic functions of the human body that seem so sweet and cute in a child are just disgusting in an adult. Why?

Because we think of babies as a special category of humans. They are not really us. They're "mini-us".

The danger of Christmas is that we can sit around and think about how wonderful it is that Jesus was born as a baby and then he grew up to be God. He was a human, but then he worked a promotion on there and got to be divine. Somehow he shed the embarrassing, frustrating, limiting aspects of humanity and became the Son of God.

Don't believe it. He was a man. He had bones. He had a face. He shaved. He laughed. He ached. He wanted.

The Gospels go to great lengths to point out the humanity of Jesus. In our

very brief reading from Mark, for instance, we read of how he took twelve of the boys on a men's group retreat with him up in the mountains.

Have you ever spent the weekend with a group of 13 men? I'm telling you, if you spend much time around 13 guys, you are going to hear and smell and see a lot of what it means to be a human being. The apostles were men. Jesus was a man. Not only a man – but surely, he was a man.

But *that's the problem!* say the original hearers of the sermon that we call the "Book of Hebrews". It's frustrating, embarrassing, and humiliating. In the world all around us, other people have gods with super powers. Take a look at the Roman gods like Jupiter, Mars, Neptune, or Venus, and you were looking at some super powers! Sure, these gods were a little annoying and inconsistent...ok, if you press us on it we'll tell you that they are just imaginary, false gods – but at least they are imaginary false gods with some zip and some power. They sure weren't tethered to bodies, I can tell you that. But we've got to go around telling people that we worship Jesus, who was a human? That doesn't have a lot of punch, you know. It'll be a tough sell in Rome or Athens.

But it's good news, says the preacher who gave us our reading from Hebrews today. The fact that God, the creator of heaven and earth, the author of the universe chose to become human...that he had a face and inhabited skin and was friends with the twelve...it's all good – no, great news.

Why?

Because when you suffer, the one to whom you are praying knows what it's like. The one who was sent to make us right before God is *one of us!* Hebrews 2:17 says that Jesus was like his brothers in every respect. He gets it. He gets us.

When he was a kid, the gospels tell us, his family had to flee Nazareth and hide out in Egypt. Why? Because a crazy ruler sent an armed militia into Bethlehem and committed acts of genocide against the local population. Do you think that makes a difference to a family who grew up in a Sudanese village of 250 other people and had to run across the border to the nation of Chad, where they are now living under a piece of UN plastic tarp in a refugee camp of 85,000 people? You bet it does.

When Jesus was called into ministry, he spent forty days fasting and praying in the wilderness. He suffered from hunger and temptation. Do you think that matters to the fourteen year old whose father just lost his job and has to go to bed hungry each night? Yes, it matters!

So academy award-winning producer James Cameron wants you to watch a film tonight in which he claims to have found the bones of Jesus. I'm here to tell you that it's impossible to find those bones – because they're not in a grave. Jesus has risen from the dead.

But I think it's good news that we are talking about the fact that Jesus had bones. It's good news for the first hearers of Hebrews, and its good news for us.

Jesus was a human being. That means, says the preacher, that there is no place in your life that is past the reach of Jesus. Do you struggle with temptation? He's been there. Are you weary at the end of a day? He knows that feeling. Do you wish you could escape? So did he. Do you get so angry sometimes that you could spit nails? Read John 2 and see what happened the day he cleared out the temple.

Jesus went through suffering and temptation just like me – but he stayed the course. He went to death. He went through death. And now those of us who are scared of death are free – because Jesus blazed the trail. Jesus pioneered the route. Jesus, who was human, who was tested, who was tempted, lived, died, and was raised without sin.

Here's a practical visual analogy that might help you. Think about one of those pictures of a smiling Buddha sitting in a garden with his eyes closed. Why are his eyes closed? Why is he smiling? What is he doing? He's shutting it all out, right? He is focusing deep within himself. He is deaf and blind to the world around him as he seeks for inner peace and enlightenment.

Now, think of Jesus of Nazareth, hanging on a Roman cross. His hands and feet are nailed. His head hangs off to one side. His eyes are closed, too. Why? Because he's keeping it all inside. The pain, the suffering, the alienation of the entire world – he took it on himself.

The gods that this world worships are either humans who deny their mortality or fictions that these same humans have sculpted with their hands. The Jesus whom we, along with the hearers of Hebrews, worship, had bones. And those bones were broken. For the Hebrews. For you. For me.

As you walk through this week, know that as his eyes were closed on the cross, he was not shutting anything out. No, he was keeping your life inside of himself. He was keeping this world in his heart as he pled in front of his Father.

And in the power of the resurrection that brought those bones back to life, go and live for and with others, confident that because Jesus knows the pain, frustration, and brokenness of your life, you can know the joy, hope, and peace of his. Now, and forever. Amen.