

"Are You Fully Human?" – Aug. 6, 2017  
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

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St. Matthew 5:1-11

Shakespeare writes in his play, 'Hamlet,' "*This above all: to thine own self be true.*" Ralph Ellison, who wrote "The Invisible Man," sounds the same line when he penned "*When I discover who I am, I'll be free.*"

Today we call this self-awareness. But, in the world, it becomes the supreme goal, because until you understand who you are, you will tend to struggle and drift through life, directionless and without contentment.

When you read St. Matthew's gospel, the pace appears to take off with chapter five. After Jesus' baptism, his time in the desert, and the calling of the Disciples, you discover throngs of people following Jesus. And, "*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain; after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them.*"

We understand these teachings as "The Beatitudes," from the Latin word for "happiness." These lessons are easy enough to memorize, because of the theme that runs through the Sermon on the Mount: humility. Looking at Jesus, the one man who could have been self-focused, was not. I can hear Jesus saying, "*It is people who are living in a condition of joy who don't need to stroke themselves.*"

Since 'context' is important, let's go back to chapter 4 of St. Matthew's gospel. Jesus, "*led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*" (4:1) We tend to believe that humans can be tempted but surely not God! Historically, the church universal has taught Jesus to be "fully human and fully God."

Historically, the church's emphasis has been that Jesus is the only human ever to be God. It is, however, equally important for our spiritual growth, to state

that as the only person to undergo temptation and come out sinless, Jesus is the only human to be 'fully human.' Or, to use the language of the church fathers, "the only fully, fully human."

This was the core of the teaching of medieval saint Anselm and is reflected in the writings of reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley: persons are called by God to become fully human. They acknowledged that all of us share this vocation, but that none of us have arrived yet. Since the Garden of Eden, we are less than fully human, less than what we have been created to be.

With Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gifts the world with the keys that unlock the barrier to full personhood. Today, we speak about self-actualization and human rights as indicators that we are the best of creation.

When I was a child, I played with a Jack-in-a-Box. Sometimes I want a "JESUS-in-the-Box" too. I want a Messiah who is tailor made for our preconceived notions of how a Messiah should act and be. But, Jesus teaches differently. For us to be the person we were created to be, we do not focus on ourselves, but on learning and leaning on the strength and security that enables us to be vulnerable to God and others.

And so, blessed or happy are those people who both recognize and live in a state of joy, are poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. This begs the question, like a five-year-old cries: "*Do I have to do this?*" I don't read anywhere that Jesus says "you MUST be meek."

For anyone who thinks obedience to these teachings of Jesus is optional, like some who have called the Sermon's strict warnings against anger, lust, and other evil desires impossible; a minimal reading of St. Matthew's gospel will not provide a solution for such an easy escape.

In chapter sixteen we discover that humility is not one of many paths to God, but the only position of a "Follower of the Way." Jesus will tell his disciples that he will suffer and die soon, at the hands of the religious privileged, but the community of faith will live on. And the only requirement for membership is this: "*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*" (St. Matthew 16:24).

Following Jesus is Hard. But then, again, faithful followers have never assumed that an easier life is the 'good' life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is telling us that the way to a 'happy' life is to turn our culture's values upside down. The world calls to us twenty-four seven to satisfy ourselves before anything else, Jesus calls us to be poor in spirit, to be humble. Easy? Nope. Required? If you desire to be fully human and to live life like Jesus. Yes. We are all called to be blessed. Alleluia. Amen.