

*Living into His Name, Pt. 3*  
***Meet the Humanizer!***  
*Daniel 7: 13-14; Mt. 20: 25-28*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Do you have a particular name you prefer to be called? Is there a nickname you especially like more than another? How about a title? I'm always touched when children call me Pastor Gerrit. It has a familiarity and a trust that just melts me. And it inspires me to be better. I want to live up to the title. So it's curious to me to consider Jesus' favorite title for himself. More than 80 times in the gospels, Jesus refers to himself as "the Son of Man." Do you think that's odd? The other New Testament writings almost never use that title. It seems particular to Jesus himself. He preferred Son of Man.

But what kind of title is Son of Man? Is it humble or exalted? Is it clear or is it mysterious? To be honest, at first hearing, Son of Man doesn't do much for me. I'd prefer to skip it. But if Jesus thought it was so important as to keep using it, maybe I'd better put in the effort to explore Son of Man. After all, Jesus was never careless with his words.

I discovered that this title goes both ways. On the one hand, Son of Man just means a guy. A human being. Over and over the LORD calls the prophet Ezekiel, "son of man." It's almost like saying, "Buddy. Guy. Boy. Mister." A son of man is just a man. But that much would have been obvious. Jesus was a carpenter dude. Everyone knew he was a *real* guy.

So maybe Son of Man means more. Perhaps there is some sense in which this Son of Man *represents* other men and women. If we say, "He's a real son of his family," we mean this guy represents the values, the traits, the disposition of his other family members. You know he runs true to the whole family. In this sense, Son of Man would then mean the Everyman. The son who represents his whole human family. A guy for all guys and gals, boys and girls. The one who stands in for all of us.

Son of Man could also mean the *truly human one*. The person who was most human, most what humans are meant to be. That fits too. Jesus lived out a flourishing, loving, abundant, obedient humanity the way no one ever had. He was what humans were always meant to be. Humanity at its best. The favorite Son. The

man we're proudest of because in him we see the very best. A real man, a representative man, a truly human man—all of these fit the title Son of Man.

But on the other hand, there is evidence in the Bible that Son of Man is no ordinary title. Strangely, the Son of Man is *more* than human. He's an exalted figure. He's divine. In our passage from Daniel 7 this morning, we read that the prophet had a vision of the throne of heaven. The Ancient of Days, God the Father, sat on the throne ruling the cosmos. Then, riding on the clouds there came rushing to the throne "one like a son of man." He looked like us. Yet, the Ancient of Days then gave to this Son of Man "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." This one like a human being suddenly got invested with all power in heaven and earth. And more. The prophet declared that the Son of Man's "dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7: 14).

This is a prophecy of a promised future that catches up the deep longing in the LORD's people. Amidst the tumult of nations, the violence, the wars, the pillaging and squelching, a hero will come. One of us, a son of man, will conquer and then be named Lord of all. His kingdom will have no end. This prophecy became a beloved hope for God's people. One day, the Son of Man will come. He will fix the world. He will reign in justice and peace forever, and all that is sad will come untrue. All that is wrong will be made right. Humans will act again like humans were meant to be.

So the Son of Man is both truly human yet also divine. The Son of Man title means both man and God in one. This truth, of course, would have been shrouded in mystery until the arrival of Jesus. No one could have imagined a person who was fully human and fully God, the Son of God and Son of Man in one. Jesus was like everyone else. Jesus was like no one else.

But my questions still persist. What's the need of all this? Why is God so mysterious and confusing? Why must he split my head with this thing about "God and man in one?" An answer hit me right in the heart during this week's readings.

I'll confess that I struggle each day to work the process of our Lenten guide. It would be super easy to skip the shaded boxes where we repeat verses and prayers. I tempted just to get on to the new stuff. But then I think of you. And I love what it means to read Scripture in community. All across this city, we're sitting in our favorite chairs reading the same passages together. I'm committed to doing what I ask you to do: read the passages every day, out loud, thinking about

them freshly. Sure, sometimes it feels flat. But I've had enough experience to know to plow right through—because eventually it always, always opens up.

This week, I got lit up with one of those days where the same old shaded box passage sparkled with bright light. In 2 Peter we read daily that God has “granted us precious and very great promises.” He’s given us something. Something of infinite value. And he’s given it to us for a reason. With a purpose in mind: that we might “become partakers of his divine nature.” Once again, on face value, I don’t quite get that passage. What’s the divine nature? How am I supposed to be in on this? I can’t reason it out. But I’ve discovered that I’ve got to use a different part of my brain. If I could get it all figured out easily, the passage wouldn’t be important. It would be dispensable. Yes, this passage contains more than I can ever fully know. But that doesn’t mean I can’t experience it now. So I just started playing with the words. Letting them reach me at a gut, feeling level. God wants me to partake of something. He wants me to be part of something that belongs to him. And he was willing to issue me a grant. A grant of very expensive, very magnificent promises. I let myself feel this news: *God passionately wants me to partake of his very life.* He wants me in on the life of love that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I started to think about making a feast for people that we love. I think of having family or friends for the holidays. We want to welcome people home. We want others to feel at home. My deep impulse is that I want you to partake of all the blessings we feel in life. I think of that when I’m shopping for the meat and drink. Because I want you to eat what delights you. I want to fill your glasses with what tastes good. Rhonda sets a table with colorful china and seasonal flowers. She spends hours making the dishes and planning how to get it all ready at the same time. She wants you to feel celebrated. We sit at table together and hope the love we share comes through the conversation. We want to laugh and toast and be silly and serious and just linger for precious moments. Partake, partake of life. What I have is yours.

Then I realized that’s but a little smidgeon of the great heart of God our Father. He wants us to partake of his very life. As he said in the parable to the elder brother, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours” (Lk. 15: 31). God wants us to share in the vibrancy of his love. He wants us to participate in him. To commune in the love of Father, Son and Spirit.

So he undertook the great work of making such partaking possible. It was the mightiest of God’s mighty acts. We can’t become God, so God came to us as

the Son of Man. We can't cross the bridge of our separation from God. So God came as the truly human person. He came as Jesus to live representing us. To live out faithful obedience, robust worship, intimate prayer, abundant love, as one of us. And then to give it all to us. He lived the full human life on behalf of all of us. He became Son of Man so that, joined to him, we could become sons and daughters of God, adopted into his Triune life of love. He gave to us his very great and precious promises. These promises are written in the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. Joined to Jesus by his Spirit through faith, we become partakers of his glorious humanity. And we become partakers of his divine life with the Father.

These are high and glorious thoughts. How do they get worked out in daily life? As we live more and more *from* Jesus, out of his life and love, we discover something wonderful. He humanizes us. He makes us more fully who we were meant to be as we step out in faith to live the counter-intuitive, revolutionary, upside-down way he lived and taught.

Let's be super clear before we go on. What I'm about to describe as things for us to do will not work without the mystical connection to the living Jesus. Without the Spirit of the Son of Man uniting us to him, we will just be flailing about, trying and failing to be better versions of our old, defeated humanity. Jesus has things for us to do, but they can never be separated from our spiritual union with him. The mystical joining gets enhanced in prayer, the Lord's Supper, singing, service and studying. It's only out of these practices that we access the Spirit who gives us strength to do what Jesus calls us to do.

He calls us to be more human. It's odd to me how we use the phrase, "I'm only human." Usually, we use it to explain why we are acting less than the humanity Jesus describes. Watch children play, especially if they're related. You smack me, I have to smack you back. You move my stuff, I have to move it back and mess up yours. It's only human. We get even. Watch how adults relate to people with complaints. We prepare our defense list. We all become our own lawyers. Here's all the reasons your accusations are stupid. It's only human to defend yourself. Someone hurts us deeply. We avoid them. We talk bad about them. We wish them harm. It's only human.

But the Son of Man is God humanized. And he wants to humanize us. He has a better humanity for us. A humanity full of peace, joy and love. That you never know until you go against your first impulse and try it. I have a friend who wrote a brilliant book entitled: *Undefended: Discovering God When Your Guard is Down*. Dan Bush describes what it means to be counter-intuitive and live an

undefended life. I think it's a wonderful word for Jesus' humanizing work: *undefended*.

What if I just said, right away, "You know, you're right. I really was ugly just then. There's no excuse. I'm sorry I have that venomous side. You deserve better." I'd be risking that she would say, "Aha! I knew it all along. You're a snake not worth living with." But of course she doesn't. She already knows my venomous side. And once I agree to it, I find freedom. I entrust her with this nasty little nugget. And discover I don't need to be this way. Because love heals. This trust and freedom comes from risking the undefended life.

Jesus urged his disciples to move past revenge and turn the other cheek to the one who slaps us. He urged us to pray for our enemies. In doing so, he said, we would become sons of our Father in heaven. We sons of Adam would become more like sons of God and therefore *more* human, more like we were made to be.

Giving up retaliation is hard. Last week, Jim Solomon used an illustration from the old Amos and Andy show. Andy was frustrated that Amos kept smacking him in the chest when he had something to say. So Andy said he was going to strap a piece of dynamite to his chest. That way, the next time Amos hit him, his hand would blow up! Of course the joke is that Amos might lose a hand, but Andy's heart would be blown up. That's when Jim made the brilliant connection. Seeking revenge, getting even and wishing ill on our enemy only blows up our hearts. It doesn't make us even. It makes us *less* human.

I've spoken to a number of you who bear witness to what happens when you pray for enemies. When you seek God's transforming love for those who hurt you. It doesn't always mean our enemies change. But *we* do change. We get peaceful. We get free. We step out of bitterness into the sweet fruit of love. We leave a life that is poisoned and drink from clear, cool waters of life.

The mission of the Son of God was to become the Son of Man, so he could re-humanize us. He came to restore humanity to right relationship with his Father and with each other. Jesus lived as he taught, emptying himself all the way unto death and hell. And now his Father has raised him as the exalted Son of Man, before whom every knee will bow and whom every tongue will confess as King of kings and Lord of lords. He wants us to share in that divine humanity. To daily receive his Spirit and daily risk living out the undefended life, the truly human life of love.