

Sermon

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Martha Sterne
March 5, 2017



Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

If you were a mountain, then no matter how the winds roar you could stand there unyielding, implacable. If you were a mountain.

If I were a river then no matter the situation in which I find myself, I could just keep on flowing, from life to life. If I were a river.

If you were an eagle, you could spot your next opportunity from way far off and hurl yourself right toward the prize. And if you were a hummingbird, you could fly like mad all day and night, across even continents and always, always find your way home. If you were a bird on the wing.

And if we were angels, why we would hear God's voice and have crystal clear marching orders and we would have no fear, no doubt, no mistakes, and no death lurking around the corner. If we were angels it would be so easy to do right and be right. If we were angels it would just be so easy.

But we are not. We are not angels or anything else on the earth or in the heavens. We are only human.

On this first Sunday of Lent, every year, we read about the testing of Jesus when after his baptism, he goes out into the desert to pray and there encounters his demons. And he prays and he fasts for a long time, reaching toward God, hungry and alone. And the devil says to him - turn this stone into bread and feed yourself. And can we not imagine the ending of starvation if Jesus had just taken that huge magical step? But he didn't. Because he chose to be only human and hungry for God.

And so the devil says what about taking over all the kingdoms of the world? You be the ruler. And now in our age of TMI, when we know so much about the flaws and shortsightedness of so many leaders -can we not imagine what it would be like if Jesus had ruled everybody instead of hanging out with the powerless? But he didn't because he chose to be only servant, not supreme.

And so his demon says, well look. Show us how special you are. If that voice back at that baptism of yours is telling the truth, then you are the beloved Son of God Almighty and so go on and do a big old showy miracle. Throw yourself off the roof of the church and let God save you and the people will be so wowed! But he wouldn't make a spectacle of himself because he chose always to point beyond himself toward the One who made us all.

When the tests came, as they do for all of us, he wouldn't try to be more than truly, fully human. Because I believe he came to show us that being fully human is enough! And that every time we try to be more, we end up being so much less. Now maybe you are used to thinking of your sin as your being less than you should be, but surely the

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temptation of our information age is thinking we can be and know it all. Which is to try to be God, and Adam and Eve can tell you how well that works out.

I remember going home from work at Holy Innocents' a few years ago, I almost caused a horrible wreck. A woman was trying to take a left out of Peachtree Presbyterian in late afternoon Roswell Road traffic, wanting to cut across choked, Buckhead bound lanes. I was crawling along in that molasses flow, and I held up my hand like this to tell her what she could not see due to big trucks - to tell her **not** come out for there were cars hurtling in the lanes going the other direction. She saw my hand signal and took it not as a warning to stop, but as a beckoning to speed on out which to my horror she did, missing by inches being slammed into by a car racing toward Sandy Springs. I was shaken, astonished. I had tried to help her - though as Carroll said later, why don't you just drive **your** car? Actually he said that with some very strong descriptive language in there too.

But the man has a point. What if for Lent, you and I stop trying to direct traffic for the universe and as an add on what if we stop repenting all the other driver's sins? What if we each attentively and intentionally drive our own car? And what if we trust that we are - in all our lane changes and swerves and turns and sudden stops and general goofiness and sometimes really lameness and sinfulness - what if we trust that we and all the others in the honk-filled, clogged up, stressed out streets of this world are in the hands of One who loves us, loves the whole deal, loves every atom, every quark?

Do you know what a murmuration is? I used to see them often as a child in Mississippi - it's when a huge flock of birds lifts up - almost always because a predator is sensed by maybe just one of them. And the six or seven birds near that one start moving as one - the scientists say birds can't keep up with more than seven moving objects - but then the seven next to those seven birds swerve and swoop with them and on and on and on and soon you have a ballet in the sky of such profound beauty and complexity - each bird soaring and swirling and hovering with her neighbors who make hairpin turns and sweep across the sky and double-back and plunge toward the earth and rise and wheel and glide and soar again and again - the whole flock dancing to the music of the spheres. For there is this unheard music. And though we are only human, we are the ones who know. The birds dance; but we know there is a dance. And a Lord of the Dance who leads us if we will but follow. Who calls us to the fullness of our humanity? Who calls us to courage, to bold life, to seek justice, to love mercy and compassion, to risk being somebody who matters, and also to risk being just a little ol' part of the Body? For to be both I and be We - that is to claim the power and glory of the Body of Christ.

How will you claim your power? How shall We? Just a thought, but I've been reading G. K. Chesterton on Francis of Assisi who of course loved the birds and talked to them and learned from them. And: G. K. Chesterton says that Francis walked the world like the Pardon of God. Just a thought. We may never soar in the sky, but what if We dear saints walked the world like the Pardon of God? Only humans can be that. For real.

Being fully human is a project worth a lifetime. I learned that first here with you. This lent, be less what you think you ought to be. And be more what God has created you to be. Be only, fully human. Be the only, fully blessed, beloved one of you we've got. amen

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