

Epiphany 4  
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

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Rev. Paul Moore

## Common Humanity

When I was in Mexico last November I met with members of the clergy and their spouses in retreat. We spent three days looking at how the spiritual life informs the clergy couple. We had a great time together. To begin the discussion, I wrote up about 6 fictitious case studies, brief descriptions of situations where some aspect of what it means to be a clergy couple was highlighted, especially the issues that can present themselves. I did it with a bit of trepidation. I have never lived in Mexico City. I had not had interactions with the Anglican church there except in passing. I told them ahead of time that these were entirely fictitious, and since I did not know them, they could not assume that I was writing about any one of them. Then they broke up into groups to take a look at the case studies and reported back to the whole group.

In the general discussion that followed, one priest stood to say, "You said you wrote fictitious case studies, but we can all relate to these stories. These are life." In a way, there are no fictitious stories. All of our stories spin the thread of common humanity, binding us all together. A story that does not do that is not worth reading.

Remember your common humanity.

That is not as easy as it sounds. It's like those visual puzzles that just look like geometric designs until your eyes get tired and relax a bit, then the image that was there all along jumps into focus, and you can't not see it. The lessons help us relax our eyes a bit.

In the first one from the prophet Micah, God calls to God's people. "Call the mountains as witnesses," God says, "What have I done to weary you so? Do you not remember that I liberated you from slavery in Egypt?"

And the people respond, "But God, we have completed all the required sacrifices, is that not enough? What more do you want? All the animals in the world, all the olive oil in the land, maybe even my firstborn child?"

The prophet steps in to relax their eyes and help them see what is right in front of them all along. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good, do justice (like I did with you,) love mercy (as I do with you,) and walk humbly with your God (because this is what the sacrifices are really all about.)" Before God wants our actions, God wants our hearts. Our basic humanity is where we begin with God, and it where we begin with one another.

St. Paul writes to the church in Corinth. Picking up the theme from last week, he writes about how God uses the foolish and weak in the world to confound the strong and the wise. The message of Christ crucified and risen again cuts through all the pretenses of those who believe themselves to be strong and wise, because it calls forth our common

humanity before God and one another. True community is not about being strong or wise, it is about being human.

Then we get this passage from Matthew. The Beatitudes are so well known perhaps we do not really see them for what they are. They describe ideals for human living, but all in contrast to what we normally think. We do not normally assume that the meek or the poor will inherit anything, or that the persecuted are really the blessed. They describe a different kind of society, built on our common humanity rather than the world's power structures. This is a call to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose greatest moment was when he was tortured and killed in an act of political terrorism by the Roman government, aided and abetted by his own people, and yet from which he rose to be savior and redeemer of the world.

What does it mean in this community to recognize our common humanity? Here we are, two congregations gathered this morning; at least two different cultures, and at least two different languages, many different places of origin, and several different races. So, where is our common humanity? Our common humanity is hiding in plain sight. We say, "I am Anglo," "I am Hispanic," "I am Mixteco," "I am male, female, non-binary," "I am rich," "I am poor," "I am a citizen," "I am undocumented." Yes, you are those things, but those come second. Before you are Anglo or Hispanic, before whatever gender identification you own, before your economics or legal status, you are human, and in this room, we commit ourselves to seeing that first in one another.

Our common humanity springs from the fact that each of us is a precious, beloved creation of God, who in God's sight is just as worthy and just as valuable and just as important as all the rest of the people in this building today. It is this common humanity that is the foundation of the Beloved Community of Christ. On that foundation, we can begin to appreciate the richness of our differences. It gives us the footing to negotiate and manage our relationships so that the basic humanity of all is honored and our differences enrich rather than separate. This is the work and reward of intercultural relating, and we in this room commit ourselves to the work for the sake of the reward, which is nothing less than the Beloved Community of Jesus.

When we remember our common humanity, how to do justice will be obvious, and to love mercy will be natural, all because we opened our hearts and walked humbly with our God and with one another.