

Big idea: Jesus is a man.

FCF:

Application:

1. Conversations...

One of the best radio programmes I know is on ABC radio – ‘Conversations’. At 11am each day, ABC radio plays a one hour interview with a person – sometimes they are famous, but always they are interesting. The interviewer is usually Richard Fidler. Through a series of questions, interjections, and answers, we gain an insight into this person. At the heart of the insight are this person’s experiences – and out of these experiences, the interviewer teases truths about their life, about how they view life, about how they view the world.

Conversations are how we deal with truth in our world, at the moment. Conversations are personal, relational, and experiential – and that is often how we convey, and decide, truth in this world, at the moment. In many ways, the days when we defined truth by measurement, fact, expert and validation by external sources are gone. Truth is now personal, conveyed personally, and inextricably connected to, and proven by, our experience.

Now, whilst I don’t agree with this development in our culture, and the way we deal with truth, we have to operate in this climate. Moreover, we have to think long and hard about how to convey the truth about Jesus in this climate.

That is why we are doing this series. As we look at aspects of Jesus – the things we love about him – we are thinking about how to share them in this conversational and ‘truth-is-personal’ climate.

PRAY...

2. ‘Just like me’...

We have just celebrated Christmas. This time is about so many things, to so many different people. But, undeniably, the heart of it is the birth of Jesus Christ. Remember how Luke described it, as he communicated how Mary – the mother of Jesus – found out about it? **Luke 1:30-31... READ.**

Jesus was born. Jesus was a human being.

John describes the moment slightly differently – **listen to John 1:14... READ.**

Have you thought of Christmas in this way? Have you thought of Christmas as the time when we are reminded that Jesus is just like us – he was born, he is a human, he has flesh, and he lived – here, on earth, in this dirt?

The birth narratives are so important when you come to the biographies of Jesus. Mark starts his account later than the others. John has this stylised verse – to which we will return in a moment. And Matthew and Luke make very clear that Jesus was born, of a woman, after a nine month pregnancy: Jesus had flesh!

He is just like us.

But, John goes further, doesn't he?

Jesus 'became flesh and took up residence among us'. Jesus lived here, in this world, just like us. If you scan through the accounts of his life, you will find:

- Luke 2:40 – Jesus 'grew up', he 'became strong', and he developed in his 'wisdom'. He had a mind, a body, and they grew, like any young boy into a young man.
- Luke 2:51-52 – Jesus obeyed his parents, and grew 'in wisdom and stature', as well as developing in his relationships 'with God and with people'. Jesus was a man who related to real people, in real circumstances, and grew in real terms.
- In Matthew 4:2, Jesus experienced hunger like any human.
- In John 4:6, Jesus was 'worn out from the journey'.
- In Mark 4:38, Jesus slept.
- In John 11:33-35, Jesus experienced all that we experience at the death of a close friend – the grief, the anger, the tears.
- In numerous places (John 12:27, 13:21; Matthew 26:38), Jesus is described as being affected in his soul – he was both flesh and soul, like you and me.
- In Mark 13:32, Jesus' described certain things as being beyond his knowledge, as a man. He was limited in what he knew about things that all humans are limited in – in this case, the end of the world.
- In Matthew 13:53-58, Jesus returns to his hometown. His fellow villagers recognize him. They knew his parents. They knew his trade (some might even be still using the tables and

chairs he made as a carpenter). They knew his brothers and sisters. And they knew that he was one of them – which is why they rejected him!

In every way, Jesus ‘took up residence among us’: he was a human being just like you and me.

If we are to celebrate Christmas, then we must recognize this truth at the heart of those celebrations – to be blunt, they are meaningless without recognizing the truth that Jesus was human.

And I love this – because it means that he just like me – he experienced everything that I experience, daily – the highs and lows, the joy and sorrow, the pain of this broken world and the wonders of God’s creation. Moreover, I can grasp the truth that his being in the flesh means that he has a historical footprint. In fact, at this point, even those who argue against the claims of Jesus agree with us on the historical footprint he left. For example, Bart Ehrman, a leading New Testament scholar who is skeptical about the claims made about Jesus, states very clearly that Jesus was a historical figure, a human like you and me.

3. ‘Observed glory’

Did you notice, too, that none of this is a matter of secrecy or subterfuge, smoke-and-mirrors stuff?

Look again at John 1:14... READ.

The residence of Jesus was observed. His humanity was attested to by those who saw him, lived with him, watched him, even

opposed him. From those in his own village who attacked him through to the many eyewitnesses that Luke (the Greek doctor) interviewed, there was nothing about Jesus' life that was not observed.

Moreover, the observation attested not just to the fact that Jesus is like you and me – it attested to his 'glory'.

Now, that is a strange thing to connect to a carpenter from a small Israelite village. It certainly makes Jesus a little different to you and I – after all, I am pretty certain – and forgive me if I am being a little blunt – that no-one will write our biographies stating that they 'observed' our 'glory'.

Glory is a simple word. We think it is connected to gold and thrones and kingdoms and wealth – and it can be, but they are mere trappings. Put simply, 'glory' means 'significance'. It comes from a Hebrew word, in the Bible, connected with 'weight' – after all, the heaviest thing is often the most significant thing, isn't it? We pay attention to the B-double and often ignore the postie bike!

If that is 'glory' ('significance'), then the significance of Jesus was observed – it was public. Well, what was that significance?

It could be his supreme example of how to live as a human being. After all, there are not many humans who have been held up as such an exemplar of what it means to be human, what humanity can be, how humanity can live. And there is no denying that Jesus is significant in this area! Even the Bible describes him such a way

(1 Peter 2:21ff). And the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus is to be a wholehearted student follower of Jesus.

But, I suspect that this is not just where the significance of Jesus lies. He is significant in this area, but I think it is something a little deeper than that. It is hinted at in the accounts of his birth – listen to **Luke 1:35 again... READ.**

Did you catch how Jesus was described there?

He was described as the ‘holy one’ – the unique one. He is described as the only human like himself. Now, we know that he was like us in every other way, so what made him unique?

Listen again to that second reading that Linden brought us, from **Hebrews 4:14-16... READ.**

Did you hear the statement there about the significance of Jesus that was observed?

Let me state it clearly for you: Jesus is a human like us in every way except... he did not sin (REPEAT).

The definition of sin is pretty simple: it is the attitude and action that says, ‘I am God, and God is not’. It is to doubt the goodness of God to do as he says, and to take matters into your own hands. It is to say, in thought and deed, ‘I can do a better job than God’.

All humans are sinful – we are all sinners. It is part of who we are. It places at enmity with God – we want his job, and authority, and

significance and rule. And it places us under judgement – God gives us what we want – if we do not want God, we do not have to have God – but that means we receive the opposite: death. It places us under the certainty of death – and we all know everyone dies.

But there is something significant about Jesus: he does not sin. He is like us in every other way, including being subject to every temptation like we are – BUT he does not sin.

And this is observed – at his temptation in the desert when the devil tries to trip him up; at his trial, where Pilate describes him as innocent of all charges and wrongdoing, in his death when one of those crucified with him describes him as undeserving of death, and then after his life, as those who chronicled his existence described him as ‘without sin’.

There is nothing secret or hidden about this significance – it has been observed, as Jesus lived in flesh with us.

4. The significance

That this is significant is without doubt. But what is its significance?

Well, did you catch it there in those Hebrews verses I just read?

Listen again... Hebrews 4:14-16... READ.

This unique nature of Jesus’ humanity perfectly fits him for the one job we all need him to perform: he can be our ‘high priest’. That is

a fairly simple job: it is the job of representing humans to God, and God to humans.

As a human being like us, but without sin, Jesus can do four things that no one else can do:

- Jesus can REPRESENT humans because he is one of them, but without sin. That means he is everything we should have been but never could be.
- Because of this Jesus can now MEDIATE for any human being who trusts him. Put simply, he can stand between humans and God, and talk to God for us.
- This means that, Jesus is our SUBSTITUTE – he is like us but perfect, so he not only stands before God for us – he also stands IN for us: he can receive from God what we deserve as sinful humans... and more of that in three weeks time.
- And it means that Jesus can do what we humans were all designed to do – he can DISPLAY to the world the image of God that every other human bears imperfectly – but he does so perfectly!

And this is what I love about Jesus. This is what there is to love about Jesus, for anyone who knows him well.

As a human being, he is exactly like me. He knows me. He knows my life. He knows what it is to walk in this dirt, to live in and feel this broken world, to be human. He is not distant from me – he IS me! The accounts of his life reek of his humanity – and that fills me with great satisfaction and delight. This bloke is like me.

But – and this is the other side of that humanity – I love the fact that he is NOT me – that he was subjected to all the same tensions of this broken world (just like me) and never wavered in being human: he stayed human and understood that God is God!

I love this because it shows to me that I can have hope in this world that the gap between me and God – the gap I created – can be closed by someone standing in for, someone speaking up for me, someone speaking to God on my behalf. I love that Jesus is a man because he is the perfect man, perfectly stands in for me before God. That is why he came.

So, here is my challenge to us this morning. Wouldn't it be wonderful to share these two parts of Jesus' humanity this week: to share his sameness – he is just like us; to share his uniqueness – he is everything I could never be, and so he can stand in for me before God!