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The Inconvenience of God



"Study for Christ in the Wilderness" by Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi

Sunday, September 6, 2026
Matthew 4:1 - 3

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

We have come to the end of the summer, at least our summer sermon series, and it's been a wonderful time, at least for me, because I've been preaching on subjects and topics and scriptures that you have asked me to reflect on. It's been really varied, and we've gotten to go places in our sacred scriptures which we don't usually get to go to and talk about things we don't always talk about. And so, for the final topic for today:

Was Jesus both truly human and without sin when sinfulness is the hardest part, the hardest thing about being human?

It would be easy to hear this suggestion and think that being truly human and sinfulness are the same thing. Maybe they are. But maybe there is a nuance between them that we should think about because I think that nuance is very present in Jesus.

I think Jesus is fully human. Jesus has all of these experiences that we take for granted, that we think about when we think about what it means to be human. I chose the passage from Matthew that we heard this morning because I think it shows two of the aspects of humanity that Jesus experiences. Not only is Jesus hungry in this passage; he's famished. He's also tempted. As we read the gospels, we also come to know that Jesus parties. He goes to weddings and he goes to party. He has compassion for others. He cries when his friend dies. He has many of the experiences that you and I take for granted as human. So, in that sense I think Jesus is fully human.

But what about being sinful? There is a strain of scholarship that says that Jesus was sinful. Against all of the scriptures telling us that he was without blemish, without sin, they point to different events in Jesus's life and they say, "See, he was sinful."

One of those examples is the story when Jesus was very young and his parents take him to Jerusalem and then go back to their home in the country. Somehow, days later, his parents realize that he's not with them, and that he must still be in Jerusalem, and they go back to Jerusalem to find him. Maybe this is more a comment on the parents than the child, but nonetheless they go back to Jerusalem and there is Jesus and he is teaching the older, wiser people. These scholars would point to this passage and say this is an example of Jesus breaking the fifth commandment to honor father and mother. I think, to me, this kind of critique is a bit weak and a little thin. Is it really a sin or was he just being inconsiderate? You can decide where you think the boundary between those two things exists.

But back to today's question. Sometimes we can think that if Jesus were not sinful he could not understand what it means to be human. But the thing about Jesus is: even if he is not sinful, and again many scriptures attest to this, he certainly knew the effects of sin intimately because he was all too often the object and the victim of other people's sinfulness and brokenness.

Just think of the story of the Passion. In some ways, Jesus knows more about human sinfulness and brokenness than I hope any of us will ever know. I've never been arrested. I've never been falsely accused in a legal setting. I've never been jailed. I've never been tortured and my body broken. I have never been mocked as my hands and my feet are nailed into a cross, abandoned by my family and friends, jeered by the criminals who are being crucified with me. I think if you go through that kind of experience, you will know human brokenness intimately and directly.

I think sometimes we can think of Jesus as if he were not sinful, as if he were in some way divine, that it puts him in an ivory tower, a Teflon-coated tower in which all of the ugliness of human life somehow cannot touch him. Jesus in his humanness comes and allows himself to be touched deeply, intimately, profoundly and literally by our brokenness and by our joy, by the wonder and the beauty of what it means to be human. Not just because he is enfleshed, but because his mind and his heart are wrapped up in the story of who we are.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. Jesus doesn't simply come to participate in the truth of humanity. Jesus goes a step further and says if you follow me, I have a way. And this way may not deliver you fully from the brokenness of your lives, but it may allow you to escape some of the power of that brokenness. If you follow me, you may experience more compassion. You may learn how to love in a way that you have never loved before, loving people you would never have considered loving before. You may find a way to be more committed to justice. Not just for yourselves, but for those who you have nothing in common with.

He says to us, I offer you a way out of the brokenness. A brokenness I have experienced so deeply. And again, it may not be complete deliverance, but it may help not just you, but in your transformation it may help all of those who you meet on this path. Neighbors and friends, family, but also strangers and those who are unknown to you.

So yes, I think Jesus is fully human.

He experiences the things that we experience. And just because he may not have sinned, by his experience of sin, he is deeply touched by that side of humanity, too. It makes him the perfect teacher to call us out to a way to achieve an escape velocity from the brokenness that surrounds us and the brokenness in which we carry.

Amen.