

“You Are a Little Lower than the Angels”
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June 11, 2017
Menifee United Church of Christ

An elderly millionaire wanted to leave his millions to his three living relatives, three nephews. But he wanted to make sure that they could handle money OK, so he put them to the test. He gave each of his nephews a one hundred dollar bill and told them to hide it for a year and then bring it back. The nephews went off. A year later, the first nephew came in and said, “I put your hundred dollar bill in a safety deposit box, but somebody broke into it and stole it.” The second nephew said, “I gave your hundred dollar bill to a trusted friend to hold for a year, but he wasn’t so trustworthy and he spent it.” The third nephew produced the one hundred dollar bill and gave it to his rich uncle. The uncle said, “What did you do? Where did you hide it for a year? Where did you put it?” His nephew said, “It was easy. I put it in a hotel Bible.”

Ah, humans. We may not read the hotel Bible, when we go to a hotel or motel, but I’m a positive person, so I figure that we all bring our own Bible to the hotel and read that. I imagine now, once people hear this joke or read it someplace, that people will start checking the hotel Bible.

What does it mean to be human? What defines us as human? How are we different from other creatures? Humans stand on two legs, for the most part, but then again, other creatures do the same. Then again, Kangaroos stand on two legs. So what is it that defines us as humans, differentiates us from other creatures? We have languages; we can communicate with others. Then again, I hear experts say that other creatures have the ability to communicate through sounds and gestures. So what is it that differentiates us from other creatures? Well, we’re self-aware sometimes. But then again, I think other creatures are self-aware. Our cat seems to be very self-aware.

So what is it that makes us different from other creatures? I think we have souls, spirits. But, then again, I think maybe other creatures have souls and spirits. Like our dog, who seems to have a soul or spirit. And some humans seem to be soulless or spiritless. So what differentiates us from other creatures? We have the ability to believe in God. But, then again, maybe other creatures believe in God. I think our dog and cat believe in God, or at least believe that Kathleen is God because she feeds them. So, what differentiates us from other creatures? We have the ability to believe in heaven. I think we all hope to one day end up in heaven. I think many of us hope that our animals – our cats and dogs and other animals – will join us there.

Maybe the Scriptures can help us find out who we are as humans. Psalm 8 tells us who we are as humans. Psalm 8 says, “O God, what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels.” Wow! God is mindful of us. God cares about us. God made us a little lower than the angels. That’s what makes us human. I hope you realize that.

I know some people think that God created us hundreds of thousands of years ago and then went off to some heavenly golf course to play golf. But that’s not what Psalm 8 tells us. God is mindful of us. Some people think that God created us to hate us. But that’s not what Psalm 8 tells us. God cares about us. Some people think that God should treat us like worthless worms and drop us in the garbage. But that’s not what Psalm 8 says. Psalm 8 says we’re a little lower than the angels, we’re not worthless worms.

I hope you’ve heard that all your life. That you are lower than the angels. That you are cared about by God. That God is mindful of you. I hope you’ve heard that from your parents. I hope you heard that in Sunday School growing up. I hope you heard that from other churches. That you are a little lower than the angels. That God is mindful of you. That God cares about you. Because you are a little lower than the angels. You were made to be that way by God. God is mindful of you and cares about you, made you a little lower than the angels.

“Now wait a minute, Pastor! It’s just Christians that are lower than the angels, right, Pastor? It’s not others who are a little lower than the angels, just Christians. Not Jews, not Buddhists and Hindus, not Muslims and everyone, just Christians, right, Pastor?” Well, I hate to break it to you, my little imaginary, bigoted friend, but, yes, it’s Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, Muslims and everyone that’s made a little lower than the angels by God. That’s just how it is. That’s how God made us. We’re all made a little lower than the angels. Protestants and Catholics are a little lower than the angels.

Pope Francis tells us what we can do to show that we are a little lower than the angels. Pope Francis is my favorite pope of my lifetime. I don’t really remember Pope John the 23rd, but I do remember Pope Francis and I like him. Pope Francis says that we are to nurture the young, to care for the elderly, to help the poor, to include the excluded and to preach peace. Wow! I think if we do all that, we’ll show that we are a little lower than the angels. We can help the poor.

This church does. We have a food pantry and a clothing closet. I have a pastor’s fund so I can give money to people in need inside and outside the church. The pastor’s fund, just so you know, is not so I can go to Hawaii. It’s to give to people in need, both inside and outside the church. When we do that, when we help people in need, we show that we’re a little lower than the angels. We can help the poor and sometimes the poor are homeless and we help them. I heard a person say the other day at

an Interfaith Council meeting, that when we help the homeless, we enable the homeless to be homeless. And I said no, we enable the homeless to live. I think that went over like a lead balloon, but it's true, we enable them to live. So we do help the poor and sometimes we help the homeless who are poor. When the City of Menifee one day comes up with housing for the homeless, either houses or apartments, then we can stop helping the homeless, or at least help fewer of the homeless. We'll just direct them to their house or apartment. But until that day, we have to help the homeless and help those who are poor. Then we demonstrate that we are a little lower than the angels and we recognize that the poor are a little lower than the angels.

You are made in the image of God. The Bible tells us that God created humankind, men and women. God blessed them and God loves them. God loves us. We are made in God's image.

"Now, wait a minute, Pastor! You're not saying that we're all made in God's image. It's just white Americans, right, Pastor? It's not African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. They're not created in God's image, right, Pastor?" Well, I hate to break it to you, my little imaginary racist friend, but, yes, white Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans - all of us - are made in God's image. And it's not just Americans. Mexicans, Canadians, South Africans, the French, the Chinese. We're all made in God's image.

Baseball players are made in God's image. I bring that up because this past week, Kathleen and I went to a Dodgers game with my daughter who is in town, in LA, visiting a friend for a couple weeks and I noticed that the Dodgers were playing the Washington Nationals. I asked my daughter, "Would you guys like to go to a Dodgers/Nationals game?" Oh, they would! So we went to the Dodgers/Nationals game. And may I just say, it's so refreshing to go to the Dodgers Stadium and not the Microsoft-McDonald's-Mitsubishi Stadium! We went to Dodgers Stadium. We saw a pretty good game. It would have been better if the Dodgers had won, but, unfortunately, they lost 4 to 2, which made me sad and my daughter happy.

The night we went there it was Firefighter Appreciation Night. They recognized that firefighters put their lives on the line and we honored three firefighters who had died in the past year. They are not a little lower than the angels. They are up with the angels. We also honored one of their families, a widow with three young children. To me, they also are made in God's image, just a little lower than the angels. It was sad, that a husband and father gave his life for the rest of us, really, but it's good that they were there so we could recognize them. We could basically say that they are exquisitely and wonderfully made.

You are exquisitely and wonderfully made. I know the scripture passage says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. But I heard a religion prof a week or two ago say that "fearfully" can be translated as "exquisitely" and I like that better. Fearfully? Who's afraid? God is afraid when God makes us? I don't think God is afraid when God makes us. God made us in God's image and God loves us, so why would God be afraid? We are – you are – exquisitely and wonderfully made.

"Now wait a minute, Pastor! You're just talking about heterosexuals, right, Pastor? It's just heterosexuals that are exquisitely and wonderfully made, not homosexuals, not gays and lesbians, not transgender people, just heterosexuals, right, Pastor?" No, I'm sorry to break it to you, my little imaginary homophobic friend, but yes, heterosexuals and homosexuals, lesbians and gays, straight people and transgender people, we're all exquisitely and wonderfully made. I think that's worth singing about.

There's a song about us as humans. The song is called "Human." It came out a few years ago by The Human League. The song was used in an insurance company ad. Maybe you saw it. The song goes something like, "I'm only human. Of flesh and blood, I'm made. Human. Born to make mistakes." You can see why an insurance company would use that. But I think that's a little limiting. Yes, we do make mistakes, sometimes, but I don't think that's our defining characteristic.

I think our defining characteristic is that we have the ability, the capacity, to help others. To feed the poor, to clothe the naked. To welcome the stranger. To visit the prisoner. To care for the sick. That's our defining characteristic, that we have the capacity to do good. That demonstrates that we are made a little lower than the angels. That we are made in the image of God. And that we are exquisitely and wonderfully made.

What about you? Do you know that you are a little lower than the angels? Do you know that you are made in the image of God? Do you know that you are exquisitely and wonderfully made? I hope you do, because you are. You always have been, even when you make mistakes. You are exquisitely and wonderfully made, made a little lower than the angels, made in the image of God.

"So, Pastor, why didn't God just make us angels? Why did God make us a little lower than the angels? Why not cut to the chase and make us angels?" That's probably above my pay grade to answer, but I'll give it a shot. I think God made us a little lower than the angels so we could have something to strive for, like the three nephews, who were striving to earn their uncle's millions. We have something even more valuable to strive for. We strive not to be just a little lower than the angels, but to be up with the angels in heaven, along with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:
God of love,
Help us to know that we are a little lower than the angels.
Help us to help others to know that they are a little lower than the angels.
And help us to show that we are a little lower than the angels by doing good.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This message was delivered without manuscript or notes
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*