

Dearly beloved,

In the name of God: Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

From time immemorial, humans have been asking “Who am I?”; “What is the meaning and purpose of life?”; and “Where am I going?” From the first verses of the Book of Genesis to the Prologue of the Gospel of John, writers harken back to origins, “In the beginning.”

In Genesis, God speaks. And when God speaks, things come into being: stars, planets, the earth, all creatures great and small, human beings. And on the last day, God is a little tired and looks back at all creation and announces: “Behold, it is good; very good.”

John writes, “In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God.” This Divine Word was spoken, not written, and travels on God’s breath, or “ruach,” another word for spirit. The Spirit is God’s breath. It hovers like a mother over all creation; it breathes within us.

In Genesis, Adam (meaning “human”) was portrayed as being incomplete. In the New Testament Jesus is the Second Adam, the New Adam whose divine role and mission is to be the Word made flesh – the embodiment of God on earth, fully God and fully human.

Ask any cradle Episcopalian where they came from and to answer the question “Who am I?”, they will readily tell you that they came from God and that they are a child of God. They are taught this from an early age and they live in that love and assurance and comfort in that knowledge. If they are children of God, then they know God loves them and that they are heirs of all the good things of God. Those of us who are converts and come from other traditions are not always as fortunate. God’s love is conditional, must be merited, and we are never quite sure if we are worthy or good enough for God’s love. We have to work hard to be perfect.

I remember a particular session with my confessor/spiritual director when I was a young priest. He said to me, "I have finally figured you out. You believe in your heart of hearts that to be a Christian is to be an angel. And I have to hand it to you, you've done a pretty good job. Problem is, you have never sprouted wings, have you?"

"You suffer", he said, "from a cardinal sin – one not talked about much these days. You suffer from scrupulosity. You are overly scrupulous. It is the OCD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder of spirituality. You are judgmental, mostly about yourself, and it is not for you to judge. It's none of your business. Exactly who do you think you are?"

He went on: "I don't know what they taught you at that fancy seminary in New York City, but obviously they didn't teach you the order of things.

"First, there is the Godhead – the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is Mary the blessed Mother of our Lord, and St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

"Then there is the angelic realm with the cherubim and seraphim, the Archangels and all the choirs of angels.

"There is the Heavenly Realm with all the saints, prophets, and martyrs.

"After that is the Planetary Realm with all the galaxies and stars. Earth is in the Planetary Realm. And within the earthly realm we have the animal, plant, and mineral realms. Then there is the human realm. That is where you exist – in the human realm. God created you to be a human being, but you insist upon going against God's will by trying to be something you were not created to be. God wants you to be a human – with all their faults and foibles, and all that goes along with being human. Why don't you try being a human for a while?"

As I have grown over the years as a Christian and as an Episcopalian, I have realized that to be an Episcopalian is not only a religion, it is a lifestyle.

Episcopalians are very worldly, sensuous people. They indulge lustily in things of this world. They embrace beauty and the arts. They like good food and drink. They celebrate life with gusto and abandon. They are a curious bunch – lifelong learners. They are involved in human interchange and are sensitive to those less fortunate than they. They can be high minded, but they can also get down. They take their vows seriously to respect the dignity of every human being and to work for justice and peace. They understand themselves to be stewards of each other and the earth. They are able to laugh at themselves and ride lightly in their saddles as they face the ironies of life. Some Episcopalians curse quite a lot and even tell off-color jokes, not taking themselves too seriously. I find it refreshing! I find it terribly human!

Episcopalians do not know what the future holds, but they know who holds the future – with the assurance as a child of God, that the God who brought them into this world and who has sustained them in this life will be with them and everyone, come what may. They rest in God's everlasting arms, now and in the future – in this world and the next. This lifestyle comes from their embrace of God's incarnation.

There is good news of great joy!

The eternal divine Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

God has come into the world to be one of us – a human being – to show us how to be fully human – God's dearly beloved.