

What is it that makes us human?

By **JIM RYAN**
Herald Special
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21
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What makes us human? A difficult question. It's seldom asked in such a direct way except in philosophy class. But it is a universal question. And it is posed constantly, by everyone we know, in indirect ways.

It was posed for me this past week by two writers: Julian Barnes in his novel, *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, and John Berger in an article in the Jan. 12 issue of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* entitled, *Madman in the Street*.

The answer given by both writers is love.

Now love covers a pretty wide spectrum, (Julian Barnes leans toward romantic love; John Berger leans toward compassion, or agape love.) but both writers

agree that the experience of love that is common across the spectrum is the experience of seeing through the eyes of another person. For both men, love is the occasion when we see through another perspective.

John Berger puts it this way. "To forget oneself, however briefly, to identify with a stranger to the point of fully recognising her or him, is to defy necessity, and in this defiance... there is a power which cannot be measured by the limits of the natural order. It is not a means and it has no end."

They both agree that love is not necessary. Julian Barnes writes, "Perhaps love is essential because it is unnecessary. Love is anti-mechanical, anti-materialist; that's why bad love is still good love. It may make us unhappy, but it insists that the mechanical and the material needn't be in charge." Julian Barnes goes on to



Religion and Reality
by
Jim Ryan

describe the effects of love: it energizes; it gives us purpose and individuality; and it is tied to the truth. "Have you ever told so much truth as when you were first in love?"

Living in the gap between rhetoric and reality

It's just over a year since the Gulf War was declared. Where were you on January 16 at about 7:01 p.m. last year? I remember crying as I watched the CBC and the first reports of bombs in

Baghdad. My two week old son was asleep on the floor. We were promised a New World Order, but whether George Bush had a material or a spiritual world in mind, it doesn't seem to matter much now. What we are hearing about now is revelations about the lies that were spread to sell the war. It gets a bit depressing.

John Berger writes, "Between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narrative being offered to give a sense to that life, the empty space, the gap, is enormous. In such gaps people get lost."

The answer that Berger offers to those troubled by the gap is "... a compassion which refutes indifference and is irreconcilable with any easy hope."

Give us the Lord's year of favor. Jesus spoke about the same kind of compassion that John Berger has in mind. In this week's gospel Jesus talks about good news for the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the downtrodden. At

the end of his reading in this synagogue, Jesus refers to the Lord's year of favor. Now this is really neat. It's a reference to the book of Leviticus and a beautiful extension of the idea of the sabbath. We all know that Jews keep one day in seven holy. But according to Leviticus, Jewish farmers also kept every seventh year holy. In other words, you were to work the land for six years, but let it rest on the seventh year. The Year of Jubilee is even more radical. After seven seven-year cycles have passed all land takes a rest, and everyone in the land. Furthermore, anyone who lost his land because of debt had it restored to him. This is the kind of promise that Jesus reads to the people.

Whether the Jews ever really practiced the Year of Jubilee or the Lord's Year of Favor, it was always set before the people as the ideal they should follow. This ideal, the perfect sabbatical, follows naturally from compassion. Let our New World Order become real through love.

Bible Digest reflections

"For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" I Corinthians 14:8

Christians are we sending uncertain signals and messages to the world? Let's stand firm on the principles of God's Word. The world is watching us.

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Romans 14:12

This is a sobering thought. Are you ready to face the Lord?

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." psalm 119:71

Yes, blessings can come out of our difficulties. Tough times help us to learn more on the Lord.

"Happy is the man that feareth angels: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." Proverbs 28:14

Blessings come to those who respect the Lord. Mischief comes to those who harden their hearts to God. The choice is ours to make.

"Not rendering evil for evil, or

railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." I Peter 3:9

Anyone can repay evil for evil. Christians should always do good so that God will receive glory and our lives receive a blessing.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." I Peter 3:15

When we walk with the Lord we will be ready to share a witness for Him. The question is this. Are we walking with Him as we should?

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." I Peter 2:24

Let's don't forget what Jesus did for us on the cross. He loves us very much.

"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit

before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Ezekiel 33:31

Many of us know the teachings of the Bible. Not as many of us practice them. We must be serious about our commitment to the Lord.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks." Ezekiel 34:2

Spiritual leaders must examine themselves on a regular basis as to the motivations of their activities. Remember, we are here to serve.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." John 3:14

Jesus was lifted up on that cross to be the Savior of the world. Have you put your trust in him.

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