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## The Banquet & the Fast

Annette Hill Briggs

I John 1:1-4

*1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup> this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—<sup>3</sup> we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

First John may be the oldest book in the New Testament. With their first breath, the writer-composer-preacher of the book says, *The God we worship is someone we have seen and heard and touched.* He was a human being, as warm and real and full of life as the person sitting by you now. *We heard and saw and touched him. Are you prepared to say we didn't?* And thus the conflict of the text is established: *was Jesus ever really human, or was he only always God?* Was Jesus really flesh and blood and all that is meant therein?

Was Jesus a fussy baby? Did he ever get a stomachache? Or chicken pox? Was he ever constipated? Did he have feelings that got hurt? Was Jesus ever a moody teenager? Did his family drive him crazy? Did he ever have a crush on someone? Was he athletic? bookish (scrollish)? hilarious? Was he a good big brother? Did he have a favorite food? A favorite color? A favorite song? If Jesus was a human being, then he surely really **was** in all the ways that being human **is**.

The way being human is so flesh-and-blood and head-and-heart-and-spirit. The way being human is so grounded in time and to geography, and to all the other humans who share the same patch of time and space as us. And we might not think we think that Jesus wasn't human, but our believing has a way of slipping into acting like we do. We can slip into acting like we don't really think he lived through times just like we are living in now: ordinary days packed with work and bills and family troubles and crazy politics and scary news.

As if the human Jesus lived in some different, movie version of this world – where things weren't messy or embarrassing or difficult. Even though over in our not-thinking-about-Jesus brain – our Wednesday-afternoon brain – it has to be messy! Indoor plumbing wasn't invented yet. (Every time I flush a toilet in a high-rise hotel in a big city, I think, *Where's that ALL going?!*) Vaccines weren't invented. Antibiotics weren't invented. Grocery stores. Or Sunday School – where we got all these mental pictures of Jesus being

so clean and calm all the time, just telling stories and passing out favors. What we know of him and what we know of life as human beings – they don't fit together. And yet faith is supposed to make these human lives of ours better. Sometimes we're even tempted to say *easier*. But sometimes, it just doesn't.

Maybe sometimes, like the baby church to whom 1st John is written, we end up making faith fit our lives instead of the other way around, instead of subjecting life in this messy, crazy world to this faith we claim; instead of recognizing the human life of Jesus as our blueprint and our marching orders. Keeping Jesus up in heaven can be a deeply satisfying way of faith. When life is good, Jesus is blessing. When life is hard, Jesus sometimes gives a miracle, sometimes a solution, sometimes strength to endure. And for all we simply don't understand – the mystery and trouble and the sorrow, that is; all the evil and the horror and the torture and the pain; all the injustice and the greed and the things that we can't fix and God is choosing not to – well, there is hope.

And I say none of that lightly: that is the Jesus I grew up on. Some days there are miracles. Some days there are answers. Some days there is comfort. And for all the rest there's hope. Because why? Because Jesus is risen. But, friends, risen from what? From the very same mess that's giving us so much trouble in the first place. See, if Jesus is risen – then Jesus surely died. In fact, he came to die – to show us how to die. Which really is how to live this side of heaven. Also called “being human” in this tiny slice of time and space. I do wonder if what keeps us from taking the humanity of Jesus seriously is the very thing he came to save us from: our fear of death.

My new best friend, Brother Thomas à Kempis wrote in Book Two of *The Imitation of Christ* (*The Cost of Discipleship* 500 years before Bonhoeffer wrote his version), “*Jesus finds plenty of people to share his banquet but few to share his fast.*” Why is that? Banquets are always more fun than fasts – or at least we imagine they would be, right? Keeping Jesus in his halo allows us our own escape from the extra-human-y parts of this existence, the humus – and I don't mean chickpeas; I mean the animal matter of this existence, the earthiest, earthiest parts of being bone and blood and flesh. To believe that Jesus was as human as the person next to you, whose hand you could hold right now, whose heartbeat you could feel in their wrist (but only if you asked permission!) is to get very, very serious about his death. His intentional death. His death on our behalf.

And likewise, about our own – yours and mine. None of us will be here in 100 years. Most won't be here in 50. To take seriously that we will die some day is to live this day with fearless joy and boundless courage. In praise and worship, of course, and all the church things we do that bring us so much peace and comfort. But hardly that alone, because something is missing in that life of faith. What is it? Better yet, *who* is it? The baby congregation did not know either.

Our neighbor is the mission quotient. To believe that God chose to be a human person, bone and flesh, blood and tears, in time and space, means God loves this time and space. That God cares about what happens here. But not just what happens to you and me.

Remember how amazed Jesus' disciples were when he told them they were not his only sheep? How he stunned his religious colleagues by calling a Samaritan their *neighbor*? Neighbors – the people against whom our own lives brush up in this one tiny slice of time and space. *That God chose to be human, to leave the things of heaven and take up the form of a slave, has everything to do with life among our neighbors.* Isn't this what the 1st John preacher preaches? The incarnation of Jesus is not just good news for us. It is good news for our neighbors too.

*“Jesus finds plenty of people to share his banquet but few to share his fast.”* The banquet of Jesus – that's his divinity. And it is already ours. A done deal, signed, sealed and delivered. Leaving not one thing in this whole world for us to be afraid of, for us to regret, for us to protect. That banquet – his resurrection and ours – makes us ready to turn and head, with him as our teacher and our leader, into the wilderness, into the wild adventure called *being human*. And where he went, we also are sent: to our neighbors. To go with God is to go to our neighbors. That is the book of 1st John. I invite you back to think with me some more about it.

Would you pray with me?