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### **What Makes You a Human Being**

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**Your Life Your Health**

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Have you ever wondered what it is that makes us human? Have you ever wondered what it is that makes a person an individual? Obviously, there are valid theological answers to these questions but those involved sectarian ideas and ideals upon which we all would not agree. From strictly a human perspective, what is it that makes us different from other mammals?

In the 1980s, a prestigious medical journal published an editorial in which a physician argued that a dog or a cat could have more value than a human being who had limited intellectual capacity. Interestingly, that editorial did not result in a single response. Perhaps, and hopefully, it was because the idea was so bizarre as not to warrant a response.

As we care for patients, for our loved ones and even for ourselves, what is it that makes us human? Why do we spend so much effort and expense to protect and to preserve life? Why is more effort and expense warranted in protecting and preserving the life of a human than for other mammals? While all of us would probably intuitively affirm the superior value of human beings in the biological animal kingdom, it would be useful to us to identify “why” we make that affirmation. The definition, or at least the description, of “why” we value humans would give us more understanding of “how” to protect and preserve our humanness.

Let us digress for a moment before coming back to our quest for an understanding of “why.” Have you ever looked at a person and tried to define what makes them unique, valuable and special? I have. Sometimes, we look at another and as we watch them – yes, watch them – talk, we look at their mouth. Remember, these thoughts are coming from a grandfather who delights in the voices of each of his grandchildren. And, from a grandfather who always was, with each new grandchild, eager to hear their voices. The mouth and voice often define for us the uniqueness of an individual. The voice of a beloved person can be like a symphony of melody which warms and thrills us.

Yet, it is impossible to ignore the eyes of another as that which defines their personhood. In fact, the poets declare that through the eyes of another you can look into their soul. The eyes and all of the surrounding structures can and do reflect all the emotions of the soul – joy, happiness, sadness, depression, fear, hope and even love. Beyond the voice and the eyes, the hands of a person can reflect who they are. The hands can often tell you how a person spends their time and what is important to them. Have you ever heald the hands of a child and commented how much you love those hands?

Some have tried to substitute sexuality or even sensuality as a substitute for these “definers” of who we are. Yet, it is not lost upon us that we most often look at a person’s mouth, eyes, or hands when we are delighting in their personhood.

Furthermore, science affirms that a voice print, a retinal scan and/or a fingerprint are unique identifiers of another person physically, while the carriers of that “information” are often the emotional, spiritual and non-physical way in which we identify others as unique, value and individual. Certainly with our parents, our siblings, our spouse, our children, our grandchildren, our friends, it is the kiss of their lips upon our cheek; it is the falling of their voice upon our ear; it is the touch of their hand, which warms our heart, thrills our soul and gives significance to each person we embrace as both human and special.

If the voice, the eyes and the hands help us define physically who and what a person is, what is it that makes us a person and a human? The key to our humanness is both a sense of time and our ability and inclination to act in accordance with that sense. In the early twentieth century, the artist Harrison Fisher created a series of paintings entitled, “Great Moments in a Girl’s Life.” There were six and five illustrated the impact of one of the senses upon a young woman’s life; the sixth addressed our question about humanness and uniqueness.

The first painting was the sense of sight, when her beloved glancing over a newspaper, first saw her. The second was the sense of smell as she enjoyed the rose which he offered. The third was the sense of taste as he enjoyed the chocolate she placed in his mouth. The fourth was the sense of hearing as she listened behind a curtain to her beloved asking her father for her hand in marriage. The fifth was the sense of touch as they embraced at their wedding. As there are only five physical senses, you would ask, what is the sixth sense? It is entitled by Fisher as “Commonsense.” It is one of the rarest of Fisher’s works, for in the Victoria Age, it portrayed a young mother suckling her child at the breast while the young father is looking on adoringly.

This portrait gives substance to our understanding of time. While other mammals instinctively protect and provide for their young in order to perpetuate the species, the human parent sees the child in the context of the past, the present and the future, each a concept of time unlimited by space. It is the sense of the future and the ability to be motivated and guided by that sense which makes humans unique. Our understanding of the past is deeper and more granular than other mammals even though other mammals are influenced in the presence by smells, sounds, spaces and senses of the past. Our view of the present, contextualized as it is by the past and the future, is unique to human beings as it is unbounded by space.

The sense of time which makes us human has a special element to it, as we can and do have a sense of time when we are remote from those with whom we have relationships. While a pet dog may wait at the bus stop for his young master to return from school; the dog’s sense of time is limited to the place where he is and where he last saw his young master. The young master’s sense of time is not limited by space. The young master,

sitting in his classroom miles away, can envision, his pet waiting faithfully for him at the bus stop. The dog can only expect by experience that the young master will return having no concept where he is or what he is doing.

Volumes can be and have been written about these concepts, but this platform allows us to comment about this special time of the year. While we are made human by our sense of time and space, and while our humanness is noted by others through our voice, our vision and our hands, it is possible for us to add layers of memories upon our consciousness which are imprints of moments of time and space. These memories deepen our sense of relationship and connectedness to other human beings and thusly those memories deepen our own uniqueness and special-ness as individuals.

Increase your “humanness” this holiday season by listening and talking to others. It is the gift of your heart and mind in your ideas, hopes, fears, ambitions, dreams and opinions which create the wealth of memories which will sustain those you love long after you are gone. An iPod may play music, but my mind plays the voice of my grandmother, her laugh, her song and the wisdom she shared with me all of my life. A film may show me the actions of others in a movie, but my mind plans over and over with delight and joy the animated images of my father and mother, who as a young couple provided for and protected me as they grew in their own lives. A portrait may show the hands of my father, but my memories of his touch, its warmth and assurance, connect me to who I am and what is expected of me.

It is faith which makes the past of significance; it is love which makes the present joyful and fulfilling; it is hope which makes the future a positive expectation. It is the past which gives meaning to the present, and it is the future which gives purpose to the present. It is the present which connects the past and the future. And, it is the knowledge and the sense of all three regardless of our geographical location which makes us human.

As we make decisions about our healthcare, it is not just so that our bodies will continue to function – that is the biology of all mammals. As we make decisions about our health, it is because of the voices, the eyes and the hands of those we love and care for, as our experience of them and with them connects all of our senses in a web of “common sense.”

From Your Life and Your Health, we wish you a Merry Christmas. For those who worship Christ, we wish you an act of faith, hope and love which connects the events of 2,000 years ago with your present and with your future. For those who do not, we wish you peace on earth which is the ultimate promise to all mankind of the One we call the Christ. In whichever group you place yourself, we extend to you God’s blessings as our wish and desire for you.