I found myself absolutely captivated by a documentary on Netflix the other night. It's called *Chef's Table* and it highlights the work of six world-famous chefs. The first episode is about the work of Massimo Botura in Modena. It begins with a compelling montage of images of the earthquakes in northern Italy in 2012. I was surprised by the beginning, and so I took notice. Quickly, the camera panned to wheels of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese that had toppled off of shelves, many weighing eighty pounds or more, lying askew on the ground, some broken, some damaged.

It was clear that a collective effort within the local industry was needed to safeguard the authentic trademark of *Parmigiano-Reggiano*, which can only be produced in Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna and Mantua, and is a cornerstone of the regional economy, with a turnover last year of 1.2 billion euros. In the aftermath of the quake, more than 600 farms and 37 dairies had been affected, 600,000 cheeses fell (of which 120,000 were destroyed or melted). Damages totaled some 100 million euros. It could have ruined an entire industry.[1]

If the cheese was intact, it could continue to be aged and ultimately wear the prized brand of Parmigiano-Reggiano. But if the wheel cracked inside or the rind was broken, it could only be sold as un-aged hard cheese, no matter how good it smelled or how high the quality was.

Massimo developed a recipe, lightening quick, using an old favorite, *cacio e pepe*, pasta with cheese and pepper, but he put a few twists in it. First, he made it a risotto, which was a staple grain of the area, and then he substituted the regular, run of the mill, roman

[1] WorldCrunch.com The Miracle After Italy's "Parmesan Earthquake"

hard cheese with, you guessed it, parmagiano-reggiano. And then, using the marvels of social media and other methods, he and others began to organize the largest national sit-down dinner – you guessed it, serving risotto made with the damaged parmagiano-reggiano.

NPR and other media outlets picked up the story.[2]

The end result was that not one local cheese-maker went out of business after the disaster.

Massimo called it *social justice on global scale, done with food*.

Don't you just love the creativity and heart that such stories show us?

Isn't it just amazing what humankind is capable of when we think, love, work - in ways that are redemptive?

When I think of the transfiguration of Jesus, I imagine that my first reaction is much the same as most of yours, likely much the same as that handful of disciples that Jesus allowed to see him with Moses and Elijah.

Namely, *this is not normal*. This does not seem to point to the humanity of God. It seems to point to the otherworldly, deeply different, utterly transcendent quality of God that cannot be grasped by human understanding.

You've probably heard this text interpreted to say that there are mountaintop experiences, and there are valley experiences and while we worship on the mountaintop and are simultaneously moved and transfixed, life happens in the valleys. Healing happens in the valleys.

And these are all well and good and true things to say. Life does have moments of extraordinary beauty.. Life does have moments where healing is needed desperately. God is present in both. I probably have even preached them this way.

[2] NPR.org, Published October 27, 2012

But that isn't the point of this text.

The point of this text, in this moment, in Luke, is to prefigure the death of Jesus.

Indeed, Fred Craddock writes, and it's a long quote, but stay with me, "…The only actor in the event is God…The God who *could* rescue the Son from suffering *confirms* for Jesus the way of the cross. This God also tells the disciples, who will soon face conditions that seem to derail if not bring to an end their hope in Jesus, that those very painful conditions do not lie *across* the way but *on* the way to the completion of God's purpose. This is a mountaintop experience but not the kind about which persons write glowingly of sunrises, soft breezes, warm friends, music and quiet time. On this mountain the subject is death, and the frightening presence of God reduces those present to silence. In due time, after the resurrection, they will remember, understand, and not feel heavy. In fact, they will tell it broadly as good news."[3]

Which is to say that there is something important going on. It is an affirmation of the way of the cross. It is an affirmation of the humanity of God and the divinity of Jesus. It is an affirmation of the self-sacrificing love that changes the world. It is also a moment when the greatness of God is seen in the humanity of Jesus.

I detest it when people excuse moral failures with the self-deprecating observation, "I'm only human."

There is nothing "only" about being human. And moral failures do not come as a result of the *fullness* of our humanity, but rather in the moments where we *fail to live up to the fullness* of our humanity. Wrong acts may occasionally describe humanity, but they never *define* humanity.

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[3] Fred Craddock. Luke in *Interpretation.* Mays, Miller, and Achtemeier, eds. (JKP: Louisville, 1990) p135. Division mine.

Indeed, to be human is to be called into that life of self-sacrifice shown to us in Jesus. Now, before I go too far, I will readily acknowledge that there is tremendous debate about what it means to be fully human. I understand this. I wouldn't want to misrepresent it. As luminous of theologians as Karl Barth and John Calvin, in their respective centuries, disagreed about the capacity of humans to show the imprint of the divine in our being. This is grossly simplified, but Barth felt the imprint of God in creation is so shattered by sin that no conclusions about God are possible based upon it. Calvin, writing centuries before and under no less gloomy circumstances, was not so sure.

But what they don't disagree on is this: Jesus reveals to us not only God, but also the fullness of human life.

And this moment of transfiguration on the mountaintop; it is a moment of epiphany. Moses and Elijah are there, but they are not Jesus. It is Jesus who represents the totality of God's self-revelation.

And I understand it is not just impracticable, it is impossible to suggest in the emulation of Jesus that we capture the revelation of God as shown in the transfiguration, that is but one of many reasons why theologians disagree about how much of the image of God we still see in humankind.

But it is *not* impossible to see the fullness of humanity in Jesus. And no more clearly do we see this than when Jesus's *first* action after this mountaintop experience, his first action as he continues the road to the cross, is to reengage in the healing of the world as he heals this boy brought to him in spasms under the control of a demon.

Theologians may not be able to agree about the image of God on humankind, but we know exactly what humanity looks like – it looks like Jesus.

For the past two weeks, the Wednesday night Bible study has read the Gospel of Mark. I picked this activity for us because it is foundational for the New Testament, as Matthew and Luke both use Mark as a source. We've read every word of it aloud.

Just as an aside, you can do this easily – if you read two chapters a night for a week and a day, you've read it. It's only twenty pages in the bible that is in your pew rack. Take one, if you like. If you've never read a Gospel from start to finish before, I want to challenge you to do it. It'll shed a lot of light on all those things you've heard about Jesus all your life. I promise.

Here's what you'll see from Jesus if you read it: you'll see compassion for those who are suffering and anger at those who are causing it. You'll see love for both parties.

That's a great baseline for life, you know, to be compassionate to those who need it and to work against those who cause suffering.

It builds life together.

It works for the healing of the world.

And perhaps most to the point, it's what we're called, everyone of us, to do to live into the fullness of our humanity.

So, back to Massimo. As he was telling the story in this documentary of the Osteria that he owns in Modena, he shared the story of a woman named Lidia.

Lidia is an elderly woman with failing eyesight who came to him one day seeking a job. She applied for a position in the kitchen and as he interviewed her and looked at her resume, she kept saying to him over and over again, "I am blind, my eyes are no good,

but I can still make pasta." Finally, Massimo said to her, "Well, stop telling me what you can't do and show me what you can." She went to the workbench and mounded her flour, made a well in the middle and cracked her eggs, and began pulling the flour into the dough until she finished, carefully she rolled it out, and by feel began cutting beautiful strips of pappardelle. The job was hers.

One day, she pulled the preeminent chef aside and said she needed to tell him something. She said, you're doing it wrong. First thing, always, before the dinner service, first thing, before the first bit of work for the evening should begin, bring everyone, the cooks, the waiters, the dishwashers, the chefs together, bring everyone together and feed them a proper meal.

Friends, we are, every single one of us, called to think, love and work for the redemption of the world, to join in Jesus's work of showing compassion to those who need it and to work against those who cause suffering. We are called, every one of us – I say this gently but truthfully: the church staff are not proxies for your personal callings – *every* one of us, to do the work of Jesus – the work you can read about yourself if you choose. We are called to do the work of showing compassion to those who suffer and to work against those who cause suffering. And before we do, before the first bit of work can be done, we are called to sit down at this table, every one of us, and have a proper meal.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.