

About 10 or so years ago, zombies became all the rage in film and television. The Walking Dead has a huge TV show that looked at life in the aftermath of a “zombie apocalypse.” At first, zombies were the biggest threat to our plucky band of survivors, but as the series progressed, zombies faded a bit. Don’t get it wrong; zombies were still an existential threat, but they became the background stressors rather than the main antagonist.

My brother recommended the show to me with a kind of cliché: the show is really about “man’s inhumanity to man.” He didn’t phrase it like that, but that was the message. In stressful times, humanity fractures and life becomes, as Thomas Hobbes said, “solitary, poor, **nasty, brutish, and short.**”



But then think pieces started popping up saying that message is twisted. When push comes to shove, when backs are up against the wall, human beings are overwhelmingly compassionate, move naturally to mutual aid, and generosity. It felt better. I read reflections like Dorothy Day’s recollection of the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco: “While the crisis lasted people loved each other. It was as though they were united in Christian solidarity. It makes one think of how people could, if they would, care for each other in times of stress, unjudgingly in pity and love.”

I felt better about the human condition.

Then Covid 19 smashed into humanity and it looked like Day was right: people banged pots and pans to celebrate frontline workers and stayed home, largely voluntarily. They shamed toilet paper hoarders and shopped for the most vulnerable. For about a month or so, pity and love held.

But then it didn’t. We’ll be unpacking why that is for the next fifty years. Certainly, America’s love of conspiracy theories didn’t help. Years of Donald trump’s incompetence and and fear-mongering contributed. But is there something deeper in the human condition at play? Are we somehow bent toward folly, tribalism, and selfishness? Is life in uncertain times bound to be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”? Is it only some tenuous social contract or force of law that keeps us from each other’s throats?

I’m not sure what the answer to that might be. There’s no simple cypher to the content of human nature or the meaning of human character. One of the lectionary texts for October 3 says that we humans are nearly gods ourselves, a little lower than angelic demi-gods. Other texts remember the deceit in our hearts. It seems clear that we, as individuals and as a species, contain multitudes, demons and angels, fear and grace, poverty and riches of imagination.

Sunday morning, while i was still determining which of my countless scattered thoughts i should share with you, i looked at a photo essay about three desperately poor people who insist, despite their lack, on sharing what they have with their neighbors.

There’s a Venezuelan immigrant to Ecuador, a retired trucker in the southern US, and an out of work golf pro from Mumbai. All of them have severely limited their food consumption because of pandemic related losses, but all of them give from their lack to meet the needs of other even poorer people.

In the words of the trucker, “I can’t see no one go hungry. I can’t do that.”

I think that's one of the roots of humanity, one expressed by Jesus and encouraged by the prophets. It's Christianity at her holiest incarnation.

I wish i had a straight forward lesson here, but we're not straight forward creatures. We're bent and twisted, a mishmash of desires and motives. Sometimes the light shines in the darkness and we get to see it, despite the brokenness.

Here's a devotional for you, if you'd like it. Click [here](#) and look. Click [here](#) and listen.

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack , a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in