

“The Image Question”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, Sept. 6, 2020

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: www.fumcgj.org/sermons-2/

Scripture Texts:

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a [NLT]

OPENING

We have one of the most profound passages of Scripture as the lesson today. One that is either

- wishful thinking,
- nice poetry,
- the height of arrogance, or
- a revelation of God to our ancient forebears in the faith that should take our breath away.

If it's any of those first three, you might as well turn off the computer... head out... whatever, and find something else to do with this hour that's more honest.

But...if you believe that this Scripture passage is revelatory of divine truth, then three powerful questions demand your attention, reflection, and more importantly, your response:

1. “What is the image of God [...to you]?”
2. “What does it mean [for you and me] to be created in the image and likeness of God?”

3. “What are the implications and responsibilities of humanity's status as [such] image bearers?”

[Jim Wallis, *Christ in Crisis? Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins/Harper One, 2019), 45]

Pray with me, would you? “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts...” (Psalm 19:14, paraphrase)

SERMON THOUGHTS

- I. What is the image of God? How about a few New Testament passages that help with this:
 - A. In the beginning was the Word... (John 1:1-3b)
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.
 - B. Col 1:15ff
¹⁵ He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ... ^{19a} For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell....

C. Hebrews 1:1-3b

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

What does this mean? That we don't have to guess at the image of God; if we take the Gospels and New Testament theology seriously, we get a clear vision of what "the image of God" looks like. Jesus, the Word of God, who was present at Creation, through whom all things were created – including human beings – became flesh and dwelt among us. If we want to know what the image of God is, we need only study and reflect upon Jesus, the living Word of God.

II. What does it mean [for you and me] to be created in that image? We could ponder this all day, but to start with:

A. It isn't that we are the perfect representation, as Jesus was, but that we are approximations. Therefore, we need to be connected to God through Jesus if we are going to have any hope of living more fully into that image. This is a lot like the "refraction of light" issue I brought up two Sundays ago. We don't generate the Light of the world; we refract it.

Similarly, we are dependent upon the infilling of Christ – being "*en Christo*", *in Christ* – for our Christlikeness, unlike Him who generated the fullness of the image of God.

- B. Doesn't it mean that to treat others as being anything less is sin? All the "-isms"...then, become sin, to be confessed and repented of, i.e., turned away from.
- C. It's kind of simple really...I see myself and others – all others – as being persons of sacred worth, just because I and they bear the image of God. And...I treat myself and others – all others – accordingly, and I expect the same of them, especially those in positions of leadership and public trust.
- D. To be anything else is to betray who I am at my core, to live in falseness, and to fall into sin.

III. What are the implications and responsibilities of humanity's status as [such] image bearers?

A. The Genesis text provides some of the answer. We are to exercise responsible dominion over creation, as Genesis 1:28 indicates, not dominion over others created in the image and likeness of God.

B. The Galatians 3:27-28 community

²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

“[In this, the]...early church was making a public statement because baptism was a public and not a private event. This was the statement: In this community, we will overcome the divisions between Jews and Greeks, men and women, slaves and free. If you don't want to be part of the kind of community whose purpose is to bring people together, don't join this community!” (Wallis, 59)

We're holding an “Exploring FUMC” luncheon with prospective new members in two weeks and going to be inviting them to consider membership in this Church. How about if I put the invitation to them that way? *In this community, we will overcome the divisions between Jews and Greeks, men and women, slaves and free. That is, we will take seriously the implications and responsibilities of our being bearers of the image and likeness of God. If you don't want to be part of that kind of community, don't join this community!*

- C. The victim of the parable of the Good Samaritan and the focus on his being stripped of his clothes
- D. Kingdom Living: the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7, is a great place to start. After the Beatitudes, Jesus embarks on what He means by Kingdom living. A partial survey of just the section headers in the NRSV gives you a good idea of what's there: Teachings...
 - Concerning anger, adultery, and divorce

- Concerning oaths, retaliation, and love for enemies
- Concerning prayer, treasure, and worry
- Concerning judging others, the Golden Rule, and finally, being not just hearers but *doers* of “the word”.

CONCLUSION

“Being created in the image and likeness of God” is a blessing and privilege that defies description. And like such blessings and privileges, it comes with responsibility – enormous responsibility, beginning with simply taking stock of what that means. Then, comes the responsibility to be accountable to it and to hold others accountable to it, as well. Otherwise, it's just wishful thinking, nice poetry, or the height of arrogance.

TRANSITION to COMMUNION

Benediction:

Let us go forth from this place and time of worship, deeply stirred in our spirits and committed to wrestling with the three questions we considered earlier:

1. What is the image of God [...to you]?
2. What does it mean [for you and me] to be created in the image and likeness of God?
3. What are the implications and responsibilities of humanity's status as [such] image bearers?