

**Created in the Image of God**      2<sup>nd</sup> in series: *Genesis: Rated "M" for "Mature"*  
 Genesis 1:26-31  
 06 13 2010      Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

### **Introduction**

This morning we are continuing our summer worship series entitled ***Genesis: Rated "M" for "Mature."*** During June and July, we will review all 50 chapters of Genesis; however, we are spending an inordinate amount of time on the first three chapters of Genesis. The stories of creation and fall are crucial to an understanding of the Biblical message. Genesis 1-3 gives us a lens through which we view all of Scripture.

Today we explore God's creation of **First Man** and **First Woman**. The basis for all human identity and worth is found in this passage. Hear how James Earl Jones retells the story in the DVD entitled *God's Trombones*.

### **I. Created in the Image of God**

On the sixth day of creation, God said, *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was VERY good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day."* (Genesis 1:26-31)

Hear again this amazing claim by Genesis: humanity was created in **"the image of God!"** Over the millennia, God's people have wrestled with this astonishing affirmation of faith. What does it mean to be made in the Lord's likeness?

In the past, some have interpreted the passage quite **literally**, believing that Adam and Eve physically resembled their Maker. Just as children favor their parents, so humanity reflected the heavenly Father's image.

The technical term for this is anthropomorphism—this term will be on the spelling test at the end of the sermon! It means to envision God in human terms. The author of Genesis describes how the Almighty knelt in the mud to create Adam. The Lord liked to take a daily stroll through the Eden's garden in the cool of the evening. When Adam and Eve hid in shame, God called them with a loud voice.

Today we may smile at what seems to be an adolescent understanding of this passage. It's like a small child imaging that God looks like her grandfather or Santa Claus. How naïve it is to think of the Lord God Almighty in such human terms.

And yet . . . such childlike faith might be closer to the truth than we first imagine. After Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, God continued to love his children. He formed covenant after covenant with the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith. The Lord set into motion a plan to save his Creation.

At just the right time, God sent his Son into the world as a human being. Colossians 2:9 declares: *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lived in bodily form."* When Philip asked Jesus to show them God, the Lord answered, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father."* (John 14:9)

Our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite God. The height, width, and depth of divine love are beyond all human imagination. We sing the hymn, *"Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes."*

The Lord knows that we can no more comprehend his true nature than a butterfly might understand quantum physics. So God sent his Son into the world as a human being. In Jesus Christ, we see God's love and grace. We are children of the Lord God Almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth. With confidence, we can sing, "*What a friend we have in Jesus*" and "*He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.*"

Just this past week during Vacation Bible School, a mother brought her child to me with the question, "What does God look like?" After hemming and hawing, I finally said, "I'm not sure—but I guess our best picture of God comes from looking at Jesus."

Perhaps the notion that we physically resemble our heavenly Father is not so naïve after all. The highest compliment ever paid to humanity occurred when God's only Son came among us as a human being.

BUT there are also some dangers inherent in a literal understanding of Genesis 1:27. Humanity was created in image of God, BUT our sinful tendency is to turn the verse upside down. We continually attempt to **remake God into our own image**.

Next week we will hear how the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to taste the forbidden fruit. The enticement began with the lie, "*Eat, and you will become like God!*" First Man and Woman were tempted by the idea that they could become like God. They could choose their own path. Become the master rather than the servant. Say "*My will*" rather than "*God's will.*" So . . . they ate the forbidden fruit, and we live with the consequences of their actions today.

Compare and contrast what happened in the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane. Despite the tremendous temptation to turn away, Jesus prayed, "*Not my will but thy will be done.*" Christ willingly submitted to the Father's will and authority. This is the antithesis of Adam and Eve's actions.

We need to come to the fundamental realization that there IS a God and we are NOT Him! Despite this knowledge, we are constantly tempted to be the Lord of our own lives rather than submit to our Creator's authority. When we try to run our own lives, everything falls to pieces. When we allow Jesus Christ to become Lord of our lives, THEN everything else falls into place—and we know what it truly means to be created in the image of God.

There is a second danger to a literal interpretation of the verse. IF I am created in the image of God, (and by that what I really mean is that God looks and thinks a lot like ME!), THEN the Lord becomes a 52 year-old white American male with certain political and theological beliefs. AND it turns out that the Almighty is moderate Methodist with a weakness for Chik-fil-a ice cream!

We smile at the absurdity of such a thought, but we are all guilty of remaking God in our own likeness. Then follow such reasoning to its logical end. If God looks and thinks a lot like me, then someone who is different from me is NOT like God. Human pride and prejudice often equate human difference with superiority and inferiority. Therefore, I am superior and Godly, and they are inferior and less than Godly. The world is neatly divided into "Us" and "Them;" and "Them" are inferior and maybe even less than human. Taken to the extreme, we demonize those not like us.

We do it with race, language, nationality, politics, religion, and more. We also do it with **gender**. For centuries, the church was guilty of treating women as second class citizens. Most children picture God as an elderly white man who lives “up there” somewhere.” But hear again the words of Genesis 1:27: “*God created man in his own image, in the image of god he created him; male and female he created them.*”

The Bible predominately portrays the Lord with male characteristics; and as an aside, I think there is a great power in the traditional language that describes God as “*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*” However, the Bible also describes God with feminine imagery: as a hen with her chicks, an eagle with her young, and a mother giving birth. Ultimately, God both encompasses and transcends all our human understanding of sexuality and gender. We are ALL created in the image of God.

Therefore, in Galatians 3:28, Paul wrote: “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

## **II. Other Possibilities**

A literal interpretation of Genesis 1:27 gives us a glimpse into what it means to be created in the image of God; but this is only a partial understanding at best. There are also nonphysical or spiritual aspects of what it means to be made in the Lord’s likeness. Over the years, theologians have offered various interpretations, including:

- ❖ Personhood and self-consciousness
- ❖ Possess a soul—although dog and cat lovers might argue they have souls, too!
- ❖ Free will and the moral capacity to choose
- ❖ Responsibility, authority, and accountability
- ❖ Immortality
- ❖ Dignity and a place “*above all creation.*” (see Psalm 8)

Each of these interpretations deepens our understanding of what it means to be human. Every perspective gives us a slice of truth but not the whole pie! Indeed, God would not be God if the Lord’s image could be summed up in one word, phrase, or image. To be created “*in the image of God*” takes a lifetime and beyond to comprehend.

## **III. Co-Creators with God**

However, there is another possibility we haven’t considered. In fact, I have often thought it is the most obvious answer of all. Recall what God was DOING when Genesis declares that we were created in the Lord’s likeness: GOD WAS CREATING!

Genesis 1:26-28 is set during the sixth day of **Creation**. For the best part of the week, the Lord had spoken the world into being. Earth, sky, sea, vegetation, and animals all appear in response to his Word.

Then in the final act of creation, God made Adam and Eve. I love how the second chapter of Genesis describes the creation of humanity. The Lord God Almighty, Creator of the heavens and earth, is portrayed as a potter kneeling in the clay to shape a man.

When he finished, God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. The Hebrew word is "*ruah*" which means breath . . . wind . . . and spirit. God breathed life into the mud man's lungs and the Holy Spirit into his soul. And Adam was born.

This is one of those "**Aha!**" moments in Scripture for me. God was creating the world when the Bible declared that humanity was created in God's image. Perhaps living in God's image means that we join him as **co-creators** in the world. Maybe we come closest to being our Father's children when we engage in our most creative moments.

Notice that this phrase is followed in Genesis 1:27 with God's blessing and command, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it . . .*"

How marvelous! How miraculous! The Giver of Life gives his children the ability to create life in turn. When man and woman come together, they possess the Godlike power to make new life. And in their union, a unique new life is born.

Anyone who has sat in a doctor's office and listened through an electronic stethoscope to the "*thump, thump, thump*" of an unborn baby's heartbeat in the mother's womb. Anyone who has watched an ultrasound of a four month old fetus and distinguished fingers, toes, spine, and head. Anyone who has ever paused to marvel at human life is overcome with the knowledge that we are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. God knits us together in our mother's womb and knew us before we were born. And we share in the ability to create life.

This drive to procreate and continue the species is one of the strongest instincts that govern life. It is part of what it means to be human. It is a part of what it means to be God's children.

But creativity is not limited to procreation. Serving as co-creators with God touches every aspect of our lives. In fact, a strong case can be made that the fullness and richness of life is determined by our ability to live creative, productive lives.

Genesis makes it clear that Adam and Eve practiced the world's oldest profession . . . of **gardening!** Their first job was to tend Eden's grounds. God made Adam and Eve stewards of the world. Even after they are kicked out of the garden, Adam still retained his original vocation as gardener. It's more than coincidence that gardening continues to be one of the most popular habits in our culture today. Humanity instinctively, intuitively understands that we share with the Lord in both creating and maintaining the cosmos.

And there are so many other opportunities to exercise our God given ability to be co-creators with the Lord.

- An author pulls words out of thin air and joins them in a train of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books to share with others a different reality that exists only in his head.
- An artist with blank canvas uses chalk, oils, or ink to create a picture that views the world from an unique perspective.
- A child at the beach pushes and piles sand into a castle, complete with moats and towers.
- A cook mixes flour, eggs, and flavoring together to make a cake.
- A husband and wife make a home.
- An architect bends over her desk designing an imaginary structure that will one

- day be a reality of brick and wood.
- An entrepreneur begins with an idea and some capital to build a business.
- A shortstop and second baseman pivot together to make a double play.
- A gardener works to coax new life out of seed, soil, water, and light.
- A pharmacist fills a prescription to make someone well.
- A real estate agent makes a deal and signs a contract.

In the book Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell talks about the concept of “*meaningful work*.” He argues there are three things that make work meaningful: “*autonomy, complexity, and a connection between effort and reward*.” (149) Autonomy means a person is responsible for his own decisions and direction. Complexity means the work engages mind and imagination. Effort and reward mean that working harder or more efficiently will bring greater compensation.

Theologically, “meaningful work” occurs when we employ our God-given talents and spiritual gifts in ways that benefit others and ourselves. It occurs in those moments when we are more fully who God created us to be. It happens when we lose track of time in the joy of what we are doing. We find ourselves in the very heart of God in right relationship with our Creator, self, and others.

There is something good, something right about laying down in bed at night after a hard day's work and reflecting over the accomplishments of the day. To know that our labor has created something that never existed before.

#### **IV. Building God's Kingdom**

For the Christian disciple, our work also involves building God's kingdom on earth. In *The Lord's Prayer*, we petition God: “*thy kingdom come, thy will be done*.” The two prayers recognize to do one is to accomplish the other.

First, this is a personal challenge to live a creative life that matters. To be new creations in Jesus Christ our Lord. This attitude transforms the drudgery of daily living into an adventure of faith. In practical, every day terms,

- Time spouse to build relationship
- Words/acts to child to build self-esteem
- Vocation or labor
- Worship as a one hour endurance test or time to be open to the creative power of God's Spirit.
- Time spent with parents as duty or privilege
- Money: invest in God's kingdom or the world.
- Killing time or living life.

But also gives us opportunity to work creatively in other people's lives, to serve as midwives to those yet to be born again. Our commission as God's children is to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

#### **Conclusion**

We are all created in the image of God. Even if the reflection is twisted and distorted, the likeness is still there. As C. S. Lewis puts it, we are all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. By new birth in Jesus Christ, we are also new creatures, brothers and sisters to Christ, and sons of daughters of the living Lord.

Let us so live that when others look into our lives, they can say, "You look just like your Father!"

Amen.