

“Day Six: All God’s Creatures”
 Preached at The United Church of Los Alamos
 By Don Childers
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 Based on Genesis 1:24-31

Welcome to “Day Six” of our series on the creation quilts. This is the final day of creative activities by God. On this day the animals were created including humankind.

Our text reads:

God said, “I command the earth to give life to all kinds of tame animals, wild animals, and reptiles.” And that’s what happened. God made every one of them. Then he looked at what he had done and it was good.

God said, “Now we will make humans and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures.”

So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. God gave them his blessing and said:

“Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth. I have provided you with all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes. These will be food for animals, both wild and tame, and for birds.”

God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good! Evening came and then morning---that was the sixth day.¹

Last week we talked about God’s creatures. This week I want to focus on we who have been created in God’s image.

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There has been at times, great confusion about this phrase “in God’s image”. Arguments have broken out over what God looks like, whether God is male or female, what color God’s skin may be, whether God has skin and on and on the arguments go. For some this becomes a serious matter. The truth of the matter is that the “image” of God we hold has an affect on the theology and practice of our lives.

¹ Contemporary English Version.

Carolyn Osiek writes in Images of God: Breaking Boundaries, that the image of God we hold affects how we view and live life. Is God a big, old, gray bearded white man? Does God wear white robes and walk barefooted?² Or on the other hand is God in human form or is God light; Or energy; or is God Formless or ghostlike?

God has been depicted in many ways. For many the image of God is that of George Burns who played God in the movie “Oh God!”³ Or a more recent image, that of Morgan Freeman in the movie “Bruce Almighty”.⁴ Then of course there was the controversial movie, “Dogma” where God is a woman.⁵

More important than the physical representation of God are our ideas of whether God is brutal or merciful, judgmental or forgiving, kind or vengeful. On this score there is wide disagreement among the faithful sometimes with tragic results. Each one of the thousands or millions who have died at the hands of the church died with the church believing it was representing the true “image” of God. Today one only has to turn on the television to find images of a God who demands war, or who is just waiting for us to mess up so that HE can send us to eternal punishment.

In too many cases we have lived out what Voltaire said when he commented that “God made man in his own image, and man has returned the compliment.”⁶ Thus we argue about the form of God, the power of God, and even about the gender of God. Whole systems of cultural practices have revolved around assuming, for instance, that

² Osiek, Carolyn. “*Images of God: Breaking Boundaries*”. Spirituality Today, Winter, 1988, Vol. 40, No 4, pp 333-334.

³ “Oh God!”, 1977.

⁴ “Bruce Almighty”, 2003.

⁵ “Dogma”, 1999.

⁶ “Images of God: Breaking the Boundaries” by Carolyn Osiek, *Spirituality Today*, Winter 1988.

God is male and thus females are less than males. The idea of females being created out of males comes not in this story but in the next story in Genesis, chapter two.

One day in the Garden of Eden, Eve called out to God: “Lord I have a problem.” “What is the problem, Eve?”

“Lord you’ve created me and provided this beautiful spot, these wonderful animals, and that funny snake, but I am not happy.”

“Why is that Eve?” God answered.

“Lord, I am lonely. And I am sick to death of apples.”

“Well perhaps I have a solution. I shall create a man for you”

“What is a man, Lord?”

“Man will be a flawed creature, with aggressive tendencies, an enormous ego and an inability to empathize. All in all he’ll give you a hard time. But he’ll be bigger, faster, and stronger than you. And while he’ll need your advice to think properly, he’ll be good at fighting, kicking a ball around, and hunting fleet-footed ruminants.”

“Sounds good to me,” Eve replied. “But is there a catch?”

“Yeah, there is one.”

“What Lord?”

“You’ll have to let him believe that I made him first.”⁷

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So what does it mean to be created “in God’s image”? Many suggest that this is relational. This means in other words that we are capable of having a relationship with God. We can reason, conceive, and visualize God and thus can develop a dynamic relationship with the mysterious one.

In light of this the basic story of the Good News is that this relationship has been broken by our sinful behavior and has been renewed through Jesus Christ. It is this

⁷ http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/quotes/God_jokes.html.

ability to know God and be known by God that is unique to us among all creatures. The goal then becomes to establish, nurture and enjoy this relationship with God.

Even here there are stages of growth and development. For many that relationship is centered in the self much like a parent-child relationship. God becomes the “holy parent” who is to provide and meet all of our needs. The goal becomes trying to convince this distant God or more powerful Parent-God to do our bidding.

Much of the current popular preaching of today reflects this idea. We are told that if we make a proper sacrifice, if we “plant our seed” properly then God will respond by giving us all that we desire and want. In this model God in fact becomes a servant of humankind. The relationship is that of a powerful deity that must be appeased or impressed before the goodies flow. Our task is to discover the correct incantation to unleash the storehouses of God.

A different approach is the approach of the mystics and others. Here God becomes a source of strength, a source of our souls and as we connect with God that connection becomes a two-way relationship. The task of the believer is to unfetter themselves from the cares of the world, to meditate, to pray, and to contemplate. God meets our inner needs not necessarily our outer needs. It is a relationship that is spiritual in nature.

The Hebrew Bible often expresses this idea of relationship in very visual terms. In the Garden story; God walks through the garden and converses with Adam as a friend. Moses argues with God sometimes winning and sometimes losing. Jacob wrestles with God.

For us the prime example is Jesus who broke with the traditions of his own time to refer to God as “parent”. Jesus taught a familiarity with God in which we can share our deepest concerns and can also hear God’s concerns. Much of the image of Jesus is a relational image of God.

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A variation of the image of God is to see God as primarily a moral teacher. We, as God’s creations, have the ability to make moral and ethical choices. This is at the heart of the next story in Genesis where Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and discover the power to make ethical and moral choices. The ability to make moral and ethical choices is what is unique among humankind.

In the same line of reasoning the problem between ourselves and God is that when faced with our first moral choice we failed. Since that time we continue to fail to make ethical and moral choices that reflect the true will of God. A humorous story goes as follows:

Whenever your children are out of control, you can take comfort from the thought that even God’s omnipotence did not extend to God’s own children.

After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. The first thing he said was, “Don’t”.

“Don’t what?” Adam replied.

“Don’t eat the forbidden fruit,” God said.

“Forbidden fruit? We have forbidden fruit? Hey, Eve, we have forbidden fruit!”

“No way.”

“Yes, way!”

“Do not eat the fruit!” said God.

“Why?”

“Because I am your Father and I said so!” God replied.

A few minutes later God saw his children having an apple break and he was ticked. “Didn’t I tell you not to eat the fruit?”

“Uh huh,” Adam replied.

“Then why did you?” said the Father.

“I don’t know,” said Eve.

“She started it!” said Adam.

“Did not!”

“Did so!”

“Did not!”

“Did so!”

Having had it with the two of them, God decided to punish Adam and Eve. He decided that they should have their own children.⁸

Many see God as the Law-giver or Jesus as the moral barometer for living a righteous life. This can range from rigid sets of laws to seeing a model of God as love in action. This can range from believing that posting the Ten Commandments will bring morality to a society to believing that the commandments must be written in our hearts and lived out in our lives. Some see being in the image of God as being able to make moral and ethical choices.

For me being “in the image of God” encompasses a little of all of these. Our ability to reason and think I believe is a gift from God---to be used. I am very suspicious of those who tell me that we must abandon reason and believe the unbelievable.

Approaching faith with reason and understanding and approaching scripture by using reason is to live out the gift God has given to us.

I also believe that the image of God entails a moral and spiritual dimension. For this my barometer is Jesus Christ. When, for instance, there is a conflict between the God of war expressed in some places in scripture and the image of the “prince of peace” it is that latter image that I hold as a goal. I believe that Jesus presents us with the best expression of what it means to live in the image of God. Loving as Jesus loved, serving as Jesus served is what it means to live “in the image” of God.

Finally, I believe that ultimately that image means relationship. There is a joy that exists between God and we who are God’s creations. That joy should be expressed in our day to day living. We can and do have a relationship with God. Thus our task becomes to recognize, embrace, encourage, and deepen that relationship.

There is a Frank Sinatra Song titled, *“That’s What God Looks Like to Me”*⁸

“One day as I walked with my son hand in hand,
 He said, there are things that I don’t understand,
 How high is the sky? What makes it so blue?
 And tell me, dad, what does God look like to you?
 I said, He looks like a rainbow, just after the rain,
 He’s as golden as wheat dancing over the plain,
 He looks like the star when the night’s crystal clear,
 He looks like the baby when mother is near,
 His face is the moonlight reflected in snow,
 His hair like a garden where all flowers grow,

⁸ http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/page/quotes/God_jokes.html.

⁹ <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/PrintLyrics?OpenForm&Par.html>.

His heavenly eyes are as blue as the sea,
My son, that's what God looks like.
His heart's like a mountain so vast and so strong,
That's why all his children have room to belong.
His smile is the morning we waken to see.
But you, my son, you are what God really looks like to me."

We rejoice that we are in God's image. What does God look like to you?