

“In God’s Image”

June 19, 2016

Starting Over & Digging Deeper series – Father’s Day

Do you remember this scene from “The Sound of Music” where Governess Maria is teaching the von Trapp children how to sing? She sings, “Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start...”

Genesis proclaims God as Creator. Day 1 starts with chaos. God our Creator had to deal with chaos. When these verses were written down, they were a confession of faith. God brings order where there is disorder. God brings something good out of chaos and confusion – many times not in the way we anticipated or expected. God forms something good out of a formless void. God creates ex nihilo – out of nothing. A wind, sometimes translated as the Spirit of God, sweeps over the waters.

When God speaks, things happen. Do you ever imagine what it sounded like? Was it like a human voice, or was it like the sound of a wind or gushing rain? Did it sound like the storm we experienced in Muskegon this week? However it sounded, God shakes things up. There is light in the darkness. Then God creates the day and the night. Sky and land are separated from the waters. Vegetation grows on the land. Sun, moon, and stars appear by God’s hand. Creatures of the water and birds, then creatures that walk, crawl, and slither on land.

And then - Creator God who has been busy forming a beautiful and wonderful world creates humankind in God’s image. When God speaks and acts, it is for good. Still there are spirited discussions around creation – how science and faith are related or not, how we treat the world God made, how we are put together and made in the image of God. These verses call us to wonder about our origins and our role within the wider world. But I’d invite you to consider that the goal of Genesis 1 is to focus on the who and what - that God creates - rather than the how and why.

It all begins with – “In the beginning, God created.” God says, “Let there be...” and there is! God has power, control, and lots of imagination. God creates a cosmos from chaos. Do you know who Bob Ross is? He was an artist and host of a PBS show called “The Joy of Painting.” I am fascinated when I watch him. He starts with a white canvas, and little by little, he adds colors one by one, blends them, and ends up with an incredible scene of “happy little trees,” water, and a beautiful landscape. And we see God’s painting every day - amazing!

The account of creation reminds us that the Spirit of God is alive and well in our world. But sometimes we’ve skipped over Genesis 1 - that we’re created in God’s image

and God desires relationship with us - and we go straight to Genesis 3 where that relationship is broken when sin enters.

Now sin is a reality for all of us, but that's not where the story starts. God's story starts with creativity, blessing, and grace. Love is the foundation for us. Love is where we start. And God's creative work is connected with God's redemptive work. They cannot be separated. The world God creates is the world God redeems in Jesus Christ.

When we celebrate baptism, we say, "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born of water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ." What a promise! Growth! Hope! Responsibility! Baptism proclaims who we are – created by God in God's image for God's work. We are God's image-bearers. Let that sink in – God's image-bearers.

Jefferson Bethke reminds us that we're a part of God's story. We're not the center of it, though we'd like to be. God is the center. And it begins with God's desire to create. To remember our baptism and to remember God's grace is a powerful reminder that however we come, we are God's people called to ministry in the name and power of Jesus Christ. And we're called to come together as the church to do God's work together.

That call means chaos and creativity. We go through periods where we wonder about God's purpose for us. But we can't forget our main purpose – to proclaim God's love for all people in what we say and do and to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We walk with God who created a beautiful world, and still does the same with you and me. Someone said, "Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God."

So how will we work with God? What kind of risks will we take to be open to God's leading? Genesis tells of creation, but it also encourages us to look for God's creating in our lives and in the church. God the Creator doesn't leave us without responsibility. When there are needs to be met, God calls us to meet the needs.

I saw it clearly this week as people of faith and people who may not claim any faith gathered in prayer to stand in solidarity against hatred and violence that runs rampant in our world. I saw it in messages of love and support from passengers on an airplane flight to Orlando for a grandmother who was flying to attend her grandson's funeral - one of the victims of the shooting.

I saw it in first responders who helped the June family and in many who responded to needs in our community after a severe storm. In Pete's words, it was "grace." I saw it our churches coming together to support Family Promise as they prepare to move into Lakeside's building and continue ministry that helps families stay

together and get back on their feet. I saw it in people coming together to move stuff and get organized as we come together as a new congregation.

We sell ourselves short - and we sell others short when we don't recognize the image of God in one another. Perhaps that's our biggest problem. We struggle to truly believe that we are God's image-bearers. We struggle to move beyond accomplishments and accolades and go back to the beginning. We forget that we are made in the image of God - Creator of all things. We are God's handiwork. You and me and all people. Bethke says, "It doesn't matter how hard you scrub, in this life you can't get the image of God fully off of you."

I wonder how it would be different if we could see ourselves as God sees us - as beloved, cherished, treasured - instead of how we sometimes look at ourselves - inadequate, broken with no hope, unloved, worthless.

I don't mean to downplay it. Friends, we struggle. But I'm more and more convinced that a part of our problem is that we've focused too much on what's wrong with us rather than on what's right. And it affects our view of others deeply and destructively.

Now I know it may seem cheesy to you, but I wonder what would happen - how our self-concept might be affected - if we could say to ourselves, "Remember I am a child of God." For every label or name that we carry - whether we've claimed it or someone has given it to us - can we say, "I am a child of God?"

The latest violent tragedy in our country caused me to pause again and ask myself: How do I - how do we - perpetuate hate and violence by our words and actions - or perhaps even more by what we don't say and do? Perhaps you and I can't even contemplate the hate that takes hold of someone's soul strongly enough to murder 49 people and injure many more. I hope we never do, but we must examine ourselves and confess those places where we look at others, label others, and refuse to see the image of God in them.

God does bring order from confusion, and when God works, we can expect creativity, excitement, growth - and even change. God is calling you and me to work to restore what's been lost - to remember what we've forgotten - that we're created in God's image - that all people are beloved.

God took the risk to create. God's Spirit moved over the darkness, and there was light. Just as God created something beautiful out of the chaos, God can take our lives if we offer them - lives that are good even though we might feel confused and empty. God can bring new life and hope. That is the Good News - that God created us and continues to journey with us as we grow in faith.

Whatever story we've been telling ourselves, God wants us to hear that we're not defined by our take on it. We start with God's love and grace. God claims us as God's own. God names us as beloved sons and daughters. God calls us to enter God's story.

You might have Scripture on your phone, your tablet, or maybe you have a bound book. However you read it, whatever form it takes, we have the opportunity to claim it as God's story that we're a part of.

Brothers and sisters, I am a child of God. You are a child of God. That's where we start, and it's a very good place to start.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.

As a reminder of God's call on our lives to see one another as beloved of God, we're going to light candles this morning. Michael will lead us in "Go Light Your World." And hear what the song proclaims: "There is a candle in every soul..."