

## **“Imago Dei”**

June 11, 2017

*In the Beginning: (God’s) Family Drama series – Father’s Day*

You feel the power and glory of creation as we hear all that God created. As I watched the video of creation again and again, I noticed that it seemed to go faster and faster until that seventh day when God looks over it all and says, “It’s all good!” And then God rests. Amazing!

*God of wonders, beyond our galaxy, you are holy. The universe declares your majesty. You are holy. Lord of heaven and earth.* In the midst of every season, we have those moments when we step back, look around, and realize the glory of God’s good creation, the power of God to create and make all things new, and the grace of God to be with us and around us all the time.

Hopefully you saw the incredible image that was captured on Wednesday night after the storm – a rainbow arc encircling the sky right over the church. It was a reminder that God is with us even as we heard news of violence and tragedy.

In the midst of strong storms, beautiful rainbows, and the beauty of this season, we stand back, look around, and say “Wow!” God is the Master Artist, and we are called to be caretakers of God’s good work. God creates a cosmos from chaos. 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.

And we’re called to be good stewards. Dave Bland says, “Humans are given dominion - not domination” - over God’s work. Humans are “caregivers, not exploiters.” We continue to stand as a part of the whole creation with the responsibility to care for it with reverence. So as we dive into Genesis this summer, I pray that we’re challenged to consider our place in the whole of God’s creation. We are connected to God, to one another - and that means every person, and to every creature.

Going back to the beginning shows the best and worst of who we are – and of who we can be. We are made in God’s image and God breathes life into us. God gives us meaning and purpose to our lives - to be caretakers and good stewards - of God’s creation. God gives us freedom, but there are limits to that freedom. We are not God; we can’t be God. We can’t know the fullness of God’s will. But we’re created to do God’s work in the world. That is our mission.

How many of us have had moments when it feels like our lives are complete and utter chaos? We don’t want to admit it feeling out of control, but we’ve all had them. Days or weeks where everything seems like it’s in shambles

– disorder, confusion, too much going on to get our minds around. There’s no escaping it.

Our God knows something about that. Day 1 started with chaos. God brings order where there is disorder. God brings something good out of chaos and confusion. God forms something good out of a formless void. A wind, sometimes translated as the Spirit of God, sweeps over the waters. One translation says that the Spirit of God brooded over the water like a mother hen over her chicks.

God speaks, and things happen. It’s always interesting to consider what it was like - this creation coming out of chaos, how the voice of God sounded, what kind of noise there was when the Spirit hovered over the water.

And let’s be honest - we have a lot of questions. There’s a lot of mystery and awe that surrounds creation - how everything came to be. And we have to be clear that the intent of Holy Scripture is not to be a science textbook, but rather a way to teach us about God and faith. Science and faith can live together well when we recognize that.

Maybe we don’t know the when and exactly how of creation, but we know who and what and why. We’ll continue to have discussions about how science and faith are connected, how there’s an order to the created world, and how we’re called to fit into it. In the end, God created because God wanted to create. And God cares for all of creation, and everything is connected.

But today we step back to a time of beginnings. The first two chapters of Genesis give the account of creation - in two different ways. The video that we saw last week was a teaser for Adam and Eve. A man suddenly breathes in air, opens his eyes, and looks around. And there was a woman in the water who asked an important question: ***"Is it gonna be like this forever?"*** (SLIDE) I assume she’s talking about the beauty of relationship with God and the one who is with her in the beauty of creation.

I’ll confess that I don’t think a lot about the questions that the first ones might have asked of God and each other. But the woman’s question seems fair - especially because we ask it, too, when we don’t want something good to end! I usually ask it when I’m on vacation. *Is it gonna be like this forever?* (Or, can we just stay here forever and never leave?)

Perhaps the flip of her question is well-represented in this Speed Bump comic. (SLIDE) You can see Adam and Eve depicted in their fig leaf garb talking to someone we assume is their realtor. Looking around, Adam’s comment is: *It’s not as nice as our first place.*

So that’s where we start - with the creation of humans. They are created to be partners - side by side. Bruce Feiler says, “God needs human partners for

humanity to succeed. The question is whether they can find a way.” And the human drama begins.

Created in the image and likeness of God - that’s what *imago dei* means in Latin, which comes from the original Hebrew *tzelem Elohim*. That’s who we are. We are complex, too, with emotions - desire, frustration, blame, guilt, shame, forgiveness, and reconciliation. All of that we see in the drama played out between the first humans who are made in God’s image.

Maybe it’s difficult for us to hear that we’re made in God’s image. Most of us don’t go around saying, “I’m made in God’s image.” I noticed that when I was with a group of middle school students this week, and especially the girls were concerned about how they looked and all of the things they didn’t like about themselves.

Made in the image and likeness of God. Much to the contrary, we don’t lift up that part of ourselves often enough. If we did, how would it change how we treat ourselves? How would it change how we view ourselves? And, yes, how would it change how we view others?

Most of us have some trouble claiming that we’re actually those who bear the image of God to the world. There is something of God in us, and that’s incredible! But it means that God’s image is big enough to go beyond gender and anything else that we use to try to limit God – race, class, nationality, status. Even to look around at us gathered here, there’s a diversity that reflects the image of God.

And we have to consider what it is that is most God-like about us. It’s important to remember that God offers a blessing when humans are created. There’s a blessing on humanity, on human sexuality as a good gift of God, on our capacity to create, and on the connections we have with each other in relationship.

Adam and Eve can teach us about mature love that grows and flourishes even with ups and downs. Bruce Feiler says that these two possess a constancy even amid troubles that reminds us that relationships take work – whether it’s a marriage, family, friendship. The first humans have a sharing of power in their relationship - a back-and-forth - that is normal for any relationship. And Feiler says that Adam and Eve remind us of the story we create in a loving relationship. We grow together.

God’s covenant with us begins at creation, and it continues. God didn’t create and then abandon all that was created. What in us reflects the image of God? Perhaps it’s that relational part of us that seeks to extend grace and love to others - and to be open to receiving it from others. And I’ve learned that the receiving part is very difficult for us. We may be the ones to extend grace, but to

truly be the one who receives it can challenge us to consider how we relate to God.

If we're made in the image of God, then the story of our beginnings also says that everyone else is made in the image of God. How do we honor the image of God in ourselves - and in others?

This is the real crux of the matter when we look at the state of our world: the violence that is so rampant, the injustice that is so clear, the inequality among those who have and those who don't, and every other struggle.

It's not easy to confront because it means that we'll have to face what is uncomfortable. Maybe it's our complacency or apathy - or maybe our ignorance about how the systems and structures we're a part of contribute to the struggles.

But if we go back to the beginning and reclaim this imago Dei, then we have to act as God would act. We have to love as God would love. We have to look at each other as God's beloved - no matter what.

God of wonders...reflected in us. God of wonders...in whose image we are made. May we live, serve, and love with the reminder of who we are and whose we are. Thanks be to God! AMEN.