

Hey Preacher! Sermon Series  
What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?  
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I remember doing a Bible study with a youth group on the creation story in Genesis 1. We were going through each day and what God created and how everything came to be. They were asking some great questions. Well, they started out as great. Eventually they got to be annoying. "If God didn't create light until the fourth day, where did light come from before then?" "Where did the seeds come from for the first plants?" The question that finally got me was, "If God says, 'Let us make man in our image' does that mean there's more than one God?" I said, "I have a question: aren't your parents here to pick you up yet?"

The last youth question is a valid one one we'll tackle later this summer when we talk about the different representations of God in the Bible. But today's question has to do with what it means to be made in God's image. The questions kids often ask is, "Does that mean God looks like me?" Yes and no. We don't know what God looks like, but I would like to believe that diversity and complexity and beauty of God is represented somehow in each one of us.

But I don't think that's what it means to be made in the image of God. I think the answer to that question is predicated on how we understand God's nature. You don't have to look exactly like your parent to still be your parent's child. You learn to be that way by emulating your parent. To be made in God's image means to embody some of the same characteristics of God, as far as we understand God. If we experience God as just, then we convey God's image when we act justly. If we experience God as gracious, then we convey God's image when we extend grace toward others.

So what does Genesis 1 tell us about God's character? What does it mean to be made in the image of God based on the creation story? Well, we know God is first and foremost a creator. This whole story reads like a beautiful poem. God spoke, and it was so, and it was good. There's a high level of joy in this creation story, of God creating, then stepping back to view God's handiwork, then with a big smile saying, "Yes. That's good."

You ever make that perfect batch of chocolate chip cookies? I'm still trying to perfect it. They are just the right consistency, the chips are still gooey, they're not too crisp and not too chewy, they're just right. And you eat one and you say..."Mmmm." That's how I like to think God reacted when God stepped back and look at creation. "Yes, that's good."

We also know from this story that God is a God of order. I don't mean in order as in some sort of rigid, unbending set of rules. "Do this or else." I mean "order" in the sense that everything is in right relationship with everything else. At the beginning of this story, God's spirit hovers over the waters of chaos and brings order so that life can begin. The order God creates is meant to be life-giving and respectful of all God's creation.

God didn't create things for God's own benefit, as we learned in the reading. God created us with a purpose, to be fruitful and multiply, to take care of creation, to take care of each other. Each time God created, God said, "Yes. This is how it should be. This is good." This is especially true for God's last creation, his piece de resistance -- us. Now, when you look at us today, it may be hard to believe that God created us and called us "good." We're more likely to believe the Far Side cartoon I love. In it, lying on the ground, there's this giant broken jar with the label "Humans" on it, and two naked people running away from it. And then we see a voice descending from a cloud, and it says, "Uh-oh."

But according to the Bible, God didn't create man and woman and say, "Uh-oh." After God creates humans, male and female, and gives them their instructions, God steps back and saw all that he had made and says, "Yes. Yes. Very good." We forget that sometimes, but it's true. We were created to be very good because we are created in God's image.

But obviously, all is not very good with God's creation. At some point, something got out of order down here. Maybe it started when Adam and Eve took a bite of the forbidden fruit, or when Cain killed Abel, or when someone refused to share for the first time, or when someone noticed their skin was a different color than someone else's. Regardless of when it happened, it happened. This is not the creation God intended. Things are so out of order.

You may wonder why God doesn't do anything about it. Why doesn't God make an appearance down here and set things right? When Sydney was a baby one of her favorite pastimes was pulling all my CDs off the rack and throwing them on the floor. She didn't even have the decency to put them on the floor in alphabetical order. She'd spend the whole afternoon clearing off my CD rack, and I'd spend the evening re-alphabetizing them. Like God, we have a desire for order. So why doesn't God come and put things back in order? Why does God leave things so messy, allowing us to mix up and mangle the order God so lovingly and joyously created?

When God created us, God made us special. God is our creator. We are made in God's image and likeness. Therefore, we are creators. Being made in God's image doesn't mean we look physically like God; it means we possess the essence of God. It is the creative potential in each of us that is the image of God. In each and every one of us. It's our choice how we use that creative potential. Or if we use it.

Part of that creativity is the ability to take chaos and make order, the ability to look at a situation that is messy and disorderly and bring about something beautiful. We can take a jumble of words, a mix of colors, a lump of clay, a scale of musical notes, a pile of bricks, or a hunk of marble, and shape them into something that has never been. When we do, we live up to the image of God woven deep inside our innermost being.

But we can go the other way. We can create chaos, as well. When we judge someone because of their skin color, we create chaos. When we let our love for the president or the governor take precedence over our love for each other, we create chaos. When we dismiss someone's anger or pain because we don't understand it, we create chaos. When we ridicule people because they don't think like us, we create chaos. We've all done our part to create the chaos of this world.

When God first created, God didn't have us. So God made us. And now, we are called to continue God's creative work here on earth, bringing life from death, bringing healing from sickness, bringing fulfillment from hunger and thirst, bringing justice from injustice, bringing companionship from loneliness. And one of the ways we do that is not only recognizing the image of God inside of us, but also seeing the image of God inside of each other. And that, of all places, maybe where we have perverted God's creation the most. We see some people as less than worthy, less than honorable, less than children of God.

People are dying from disease and from oppression. People are protesting and rioting. People are speaking up and speaking out from a place of conviction, a place of faith. And the moment we stop trying to understand them and start trying to silence them, we've covered up the image of God inside of us. The moment we put our own conveniences and comforts above the lives and livelihoods of those seeking justice, we've stopped creating and started destroying. The

moment that we ration our love and respect based on someone's political beliefs, we've added to the chaos.

When people die of hunger, things are out of order. When people sleep on the street, things are out of order. When people don't have the freedom to be the people God created them to be, things are out of order. And as God's creation, made in God's image, we are called to be creators, to help restore order to a world that is so out of balance to right relationships, to the "very good" God created it to be. Are you living out the image of God inside of you? Are you creating? Or are you adding to the chaos?

Our life is about more than just eating and sleeping and working and dying. We are called to create, to help people see the light in the midst of darkness, to see hope in the midst of the chaos. When we do, we are doing more than just helping others. We are living out the image of God within us and honoring the image of God inside of them. There is a lot of chaos out there right now. Go, be creators.