



15 PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 5 & 6, 2015

1ST, MARSHALL
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Genesis 1:1-2:4a; John 1:1-5
The Spittin' Image of God

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The title of my sermon is “*The Spittin' Image of God*” which comes from vs. 26 & 27 of today’s passage from Genesis 1. In v. 26, God first speaks of this divine intention. Says the Lord,

“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...

Then in v. 27 we hear that God follows through on this amazing plan:

*So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Three times in **two** verses we’re told that we were created in the image of God. So we’re clear about that, right? We were created in the image of God... What’s NOT so clear is what that exactly means!

Does it mean that we can LOOK like God?

Does it mean that we can THINK like God?

Does it mean that we can LOVE like God?

Does it mean that we can CREATE like God?

My guess is that *being made in the image of God* is **ALL** of those things, and **more** – more than we can ever imagine, more than we can ever dream. But for today, I’d say that our list, though short, covers enough of the critical stuff.

For, if indeed, we can CREATE a little bit like God, and LOVE a little bit like God, and THINK a little bit like God...then surely that will make us LOOK a little bit like God. And more than that, it’ll give us the right to claim that we truly are *the spittin' image of God*.

So let’s take a closer look at our lesson from Genesis 1. The opening scene describes one of the most chaotic and threatening environments that a human being can imagine. Verse one states:

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,
the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a
wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*

That is the **perfect picture** of **CHAOS**, right?, the perfect storm. Chaos is that terrible experience of having **nothing solid** and predictable, and **everything threatening** and changing. The phrase in the Hebrew language even sounds like its meaning: *tohu va vohu* means *formless and empty*.

I think that the closest we can get to understanding this scene is to picture ourselves after a shipwreck: you're alone, in the inky black water, on a moonless, starless night, while the wind drives the waves this way and that, howling overhead...*and no one knows where you are* – including you!

Tohu va vohu – formless and empty. So God, after gazing upon that cauldron of chaos and confusion, says... (lightbulb moment) *Let there be LIGHT*... That's the very first thing we humans need, isn't it? We're gifted with sight, but not at night – so God said, *Let there be light*. And so begins this beautiful act of creating order out of chaos.

And every step of the way, God continues to mold creation into an orderly existence – for a very specific purpose. Prof. Mark Thronveit of Luther Seminary sees a two-step order to this unfolding of creation. On the first three days, God deals with the **formlessness** of creation.

On Day:

- 1 (v. 4) God separates **light** from **darkness**
- 2 (v. 7) God establishes the dome of the **SKY** to separate the waters **above** (rain) from those on the earth's surface.
- 3 (v. 9) God separates the **dry land** from the waters, and plants grow.

What we have is a beautiful, orderly, peaceable structure – almost like a botanical garden...but without a living soul in sight – animal or human!

So over the next three days, says Thronveit, *God deals with the **empty** aspect of chaos... by filling these arenas with inhabitants* (Working Preacher, Gen. 1).

On Day:

- 4 the indistinct separation of light from darkness on Day 1 is now made specific, as the *sun, moon and stars* are hung in the heavens.

On Day:

-5 creatures are called forth to fill the seas and skies from Day 2 – with the addition of a blessing from God to *be fruitful and multiply*.

-6, God then fills the dry land of Day 3 – and it's foliage – with the rest of the world's creatures – for only now they can thrive provided for by everything else that was called into being before.

Isn't that great? It's a beautiful depiction of the orderliness of creation – both the end result and the process. It doesn't matter if you believe that God created the world in SIX 24 hour periods, or SIX 24 million year periods. What **does** matter is that **God** created it – for a very specific purpose. And that's what we have to tackle next.

And it centers around the question of what it means for us to be made in the image of God. What gives us the ability to be co-workers of God in this great endeavor of bringing order to *creation*, is the fact that we have been made in the image of God.

Now, it may seem a little audacious for us to claim that we and God are made out of the same stuff – but those are God's words, not ours. *Let us make humankind in our image*, says the Lord. At that point, it's really kinda fun, kinda cool, kinda neat or rad or far out or whatever my grandchildren will be saying in a few years that means the same thing, to claim that we are:

- a chip off the old block,
 - cut from the same cloth,
 - an apple (so to speak!) that didn't fall far from the tree.
- You and I, WE are the spittin' image of God!

The trouble starts when we move beyond **those** words and actually **finish** God's sentence. The Lord goes on to declare that we should be given **dominion** over every living thing above the earth, under the earth and on the earth.

Dominion... Synonyms for this word are all over the map. From the same root word comes those dark terms: **dominance** and **domineering**. Yet, in the Hebrew language, the word also means **rule, realm, or reign**.

Now, history is filled with examples of rulers who exercised the **WRONG** kind of dominion over their subjects. Name a few: Hitler, Stalin...

So what do you suppose God is aiming at here? What kind of **rule**, what kind of **realm**, what kind of **reign** does God expect of us? **Any ideas?**

Yeah, I'm thinking God is hoping to see that humanity's rule or reign over the earth's creatures is the same rule or reign that God shows to us, right? **So let's brainstorm for a minute about how God rules: What does that look like for us?**

The reign of God in the Old Testament is easy: summarized by the 10 Commandments. Then Jesus comes along, puts the law on steroids and tells us:

-Do unto others as you would have them do to you...

-Turn the other cheek...

*-Forgive 70 TIMES 7. I saw a joke this week on Facebook for people like me who hate having to do public math. It showed Jesus sharing with his disciples this very line: forgive 70 TIMES 7. One of the guys in the back, my spiritual ancestor, said, ***Oh, great! Now I have to forgive my neighbor AND do math!!!****

But in the end, it's not calculus or rocket science, it's not nuclear physics or brain surgery. Instead, living out our calling to reflect the image of God means to continually work to bring order out of chaos – for ourselves and our loved ones, for our neighbors, and for the world.

And I firmly believe that our best work will be done when we start with our own hearts, then work our way out from our homes to the stranger down the street. We know that this world is *tohu va vohu*, chaotic and empty in so many ways.

Thanks be to God that we have been created in the image of God, and so are able to reflect the reign and rule of God by working to create order out of chaos, and filling it's emptiness with the good news of God's love for all people in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.