

Summary of the Sermon

Again like the last sermon, we're going to give a fuller summary than usual because there's a lot of detail to capture and file away.

In the Beginning (Week 3) - Made In God's Image:

Today and next Sunday, we're going to ask the biblical creation account - what does it mean to be human? Today, we'll take a deep dive into Genesis 1.26-28, while on 11/6, we'll explore how Genesis 2 presents human distinctiveness and purpose.



As we do, let's exercise great humility, for humanness is wonderful and mysterious, unfathomable in its depth, or, as Macrina the Younger in the 300s AD put it, "A human being is a small cosmos."

1. The first thing that jumps off the page in Genesis 1.26-28 is its use of the similar terms "image" and "likeness." These both refer to a physical similarity or resemblance, think of our expression "the spitting of image of so and so." These words are often used of idols, physical images of the gods, and of statues of a king which proclaim his governance of a region, like a nation's flag might today.

To the Hebrews in 600 BC, this description of humanity would be really intriguing, because they are commanded in the Mosaic law to have no physical depictions of God (i.e., Exodus 20.4). Here's how Walter Brueggemann, eminent Old Testament scholar puts it: "Against the critique of every religious temptation to idolatry, Genesis 1 makes a surprising counter-assertion. There is one way in which God is imaged in the world, and only one: humanness. This is the only creature, the only part of creation, which discloses to us something about the reality of God."

So we humans display or make known God in a way that nothing else does, which then leads us to conclude - many who have lost faith God started by losing the ability to see God in others. Our love, sacrifice, and goodness offer a window into God that nothing else can; our hate, anger, pettiness, etc. closes that window.

But that's not all. In the ancient Mesopotamian world, only kings were thought to be God's "image" or "likeness." Genesis 1.26-27 blows the doors off that very narrow categorization by declaring that all human beings are, each one and every one. We pause here and muse - we believe in and see God's image in ourselves only to the degree that we believe in and see it in those we like, understand, or value the least.

One more tidbit - it seems as if verse 27 was added to verse 26 explicitly to pronounce that both sexes, men and women, are made together and equally in God's "image." In a predominantly patriarchal world, including Israel itself, this was revolutionary and groundbreaking (if you will, the Old Testament isn't that "old" after all!). And for all the conversation about the masculine nomenclature for God in the Bible, we ought to start where God Himself does - God is expressed and seen in both sexes equally, and in how all humans interact with each other.

2. We also spent time unpacking Genesis 1.28, which historically has been one of the most misunderstood passages in all scripture, and led to all manner of abuse, exploitation, and outright evil, often in the name of Christ. If we use our own rather human definitions of "subdue" and "have dominion," we open a Pandora's box of trouble.

Here's a textual feature of Genesis 1 that once you see it, you can't unsee it. God calls the different facets of creation "good" six times, and "very good" as a sum total. Guess which one single piece of creation is not labeled "good" explicitly? Human beings. We're more open-ended and indeterminate. We are God's image and likeness, who are to govern and guide creation, and our "goodness" will largely depend on whether or not we're "good" for God's "good" creation.

Think back to the historical meaning of "image" and "likeness": we are like God's statue (banner or flag) declaring His, not our, benevolent kingship over all creation. At best, we are stewards or viceregents on His behalf. And, again tapping into the actual definition of both terms, how we guide, oversee, and develop creation should actually look like how God Himself: in Genesis 1, God orders disorder and brings fulfillment to emptiness (1.2), He pauses long enough to see all creation's goodness, and then He rests to delight in it and just let creation be...so should we.

If you doubt this reading of 1.28, look no further than humanity's God-given task one chapter later. In Genesis 2.15, humans are charged to till (nurture or serve) and keep (protect) creation. To fully appreciate those two verbs, you have to know how they're used most often in the Mosaic Law, which was written down concurrently with Genesis: they are used of priests and Levites working, sacrificing, and praising at the Tabernacle and Temple (in fact, both words are used together to that end in Numbers 3.7-8).

Thus, environmentalism or creation care rightly understood is not political nor part of a progressive agenda; it is biblical, and it is an act of worship. As Wendell Berry, activist, farmer, and noteworthy writer on spirituality, says it: "The care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our hope."

To help nature thrive and flourish is every bit an act of worship as singing a hymn, reading a Bible, or praying. Astounding, isn't it.

3. So here are our three primary takeaways from Genesis 1.26-28:

1) We - you and me and everyone else - are the clearest, best way for God to made known in the world, according to Genesis 1.

2) Every single person, especially those you don't like or appreciate or agree with, bears God's image and likeness.

3) We need to nurture and protect our little parts of the world, in so doing being stewards of God's good created order, acting toward and appreciating it as He Himself does.

Prayer for the Week

From The Web of Creation Worship Resource:

Loving God, all creation calls You blessed, and so do we, and so do we.

Your spirit imprints the whole universe with life and mystery. Yes, all creation proclaims Your love. We now join this chorus of praise.

For You have woven an intimate tapestry and called it very good. In love You have formed a universe so diverse yet so related, and into its web you call us forth to walk the land and swim the sea with all nature. To the stars we seem no more than blades of grass, yet to You, each of us is an irreplaceable treasure.

Loving God, as You guide the whole world into salvation, lead us with Your Spirit that we might not be only pilgrims on the earth, but pilgrims with the earth, journeying home to You.

So again we declare - Loving God, all creation calls You blessed, and so do we, and so do we, amen.

Explore Creation Care This Week

- Short videos of Christian biblical scholars talking about the scriptural mandate to care for creation:

[Creation Care | Genesis 1 | Biblical Context Explained](#)

[Christians and Creation Care: What the Bible Says about Environmental Stewardship \(Sandra Richter\)](#)

[Christians and the Environment: Seven Minute Seminary](#)

- Practical ideas for how you, in your little part of the world, can care for creation:

[31 Ways To Care For Creation](#)

[Seven practical ways to care for creation](#)

- Get to know Wendell Berry, one of the great Christian environmental activists of the last 100 years...the first is short clip entitled "Now We're Hearing from the World," the second is one of his most moving poems about creation care entitled, "A Vision," and the third is to an introductory anthology of his essays and poetry:

[Wendell Berry: "Now We're Hearing from the World"](#)

["A Vision" by Wendell Berry](#)

[World-Ending Fire](#)

- Two good resource pages on the Christian practice of creation care:

[Creation Care – The Episcopal Church](#)

[Creation Care - Lausanne Movement](#)

- Our own denomination's initiative to encourage congregations to care for and nurture creation:

[Presbyterian Mission Agency Earth Care Congregations](#)