

Genesis 1:26-2:3
Psalm 139:13-16
Image of God
WRCoB 9.4.22

Many white pastors in white congregations
Are reluctant to preach on the subject of racism.

Many think it's political
That it doesn't belong in the pulpit.

Conservative white pastors worry
It might appear too left-leaning.

Some think of themselves and their congregations
As not in-your-face racist
So, they don't see it as their problem.

Some don't understand systemic racism and call it a hoax.

Many oppose Critical Race Theory in education even though
It is only an accurate description of American history

They believe it is an attempt to make white kids feel bad.

They see racism as a black folk problem.

But you know what? it's a white folk problem!

As American Christians

If we seek to be at all relevant in today's world

If we seek to be active kingdom builders

If we seek to be on the cutting edge of ministry

Then fighting racism has to be central to a church's ministry.

For many whites, the Black Lives Matter movement
Which followed the incident in Ferguson, Mo

And the 2020 murders of Ahmaud Arbery
Breonna Taylor and George Floyd
Were instrumental in raising awareness of racism.

Unfortunately, it raised awareness
In both positive and negative ways.
Dividing whites into two positions.

The first position wonders why we're still talking about it.
The second, exhausted by trying to explain it.

Not to mention the utter despair of Black America.

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During the pandemic we formed a book study.

We read, studied, and discussed
Four books on racism in America.

The Color of Compromise by Jemar Tisby
How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram Kendi

Richmond's Unhealed History by Benjamin Cambell
And *The Sum of Us* by Heather McGhee

We concluded our study with Benjamin Campbell
The author of *Richmond's Unhealed History*
Joining us in our book study.

And we walked Richmond's Slave Trail.

I have preached several times on racism.

I raise the subject of again

As I looked at this Scripture Lesson..

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The focus of our lesson

Is on God's climatic act in creation.

It takes place on the sixth day of creation.

Hear it from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, The Message

Genesis 1:26 MSG

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

Genesis 1:27 The Voice

So God did *just that*. He created humanity in His image, created them male and female.

When God spoke the universe into existence

With galaxies and quarks and everything in between

God placed planet Earth near enough to a star

To receive its light and heat

But not too close as to burn it up.

It was an exceptionally unique set of factors.

A splendid place perfect for life to happen.

Creativity and beauty were beyond comparison.

But as James Weldon Johnson's poem says
God was lonely.

And so, God created something to keep God company.

Genesis 2:7 NRSVUE

7 then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

When God created human beings
It was the pinnacle of creation
The last great act before God rested on the 7th day.

The crown and glory of God.

Hey folks, that's us!

We were created in God's own image
In God's image human beings were created
Male and female God created them.

And here we are.

And within humankind God created great diversity

*Red, brown, yellow, black, and white
They are precious in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

In God's own image.

I mean, seriously, what **does** that mean?

Some understand the image of God

As possessing certain qualities

Not possessed by the rest of creation

- Possession of a soul
- The ability to reason
- The awareness of self
- And the potential awareness of God

That is certainly one way to understand the phrase.

But I was made aware of other perspectives

In understanding the image of God

Some of the more current theological thought.

Pete Enns, professor at Eastern University

Seems to think it is a whole lot simpler

Than personal attributes God gave humankind.

He likens the image of God in Genesis

To the image of kings in the ancient world.

Since rulers could not be everywhere at once

They erected monuments or statues of themselves

And place them throughout their kingdom.

These "images" let everyone know that the king's rule

Extended wherever his image was found.

The image of God is all about
Humanity's role as God's kingly representatives.

J. Richard Middleton from Roberts Wesleyan College

The image of God describes

The royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world.

Image of God means that humans have been given

Power to share in God's rule or administration of the earth's resources and creatures.

Psalm 8 describes it perfectly.

Psalm 8:5-6 CEV

**⁵You made us a little lower
than you yourself,
and you have crowned us
with glory and honor.**

**⁶You let us rule everything
your hands have made.
And you put all of it
under our power—**

Humanity is different from the rest of creation.

There is nothing in all of creation
That has a higher status than humanity.

God created us to be caretakers of the rest of creation.

In that sense, we embody the image of God
Because we represent God on Earth.

That was God's intention.

However, we have failed to fulfill the original intent
As image bearers of God on Earth.

So God sent Jesus
As the fullest expression of God
The quintessential "image bearer."

From the Apostle Paul

2 Corinthians 4:4 . . . Christ, who is the image of God.

Colossians 1:15 The Son is the image of the invisible God.

I quote from Pete Enns

The image of God in Genesis is not about "what makes us human," such as one's soul. It is about the lofty role God has given humankind to be his representative rulers.

Jesus is the full image-bearer of God. He is the most human of any human who has ever lived. By faith we too participate in restored humanity.

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As followers of Jesus we become image bearers of Christ.

God's intent for humanity to be God's representatives
To care for each other and the rest of creation
Has been flawed and disfigured by sin.

We have damaged our relationship to God
We have polluted our relationship to God's creation
And we have spoiled our relationship to one another.

For God's ultimate redemption comprises all three.

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The truth that we were created in the image of God
Is central to how were to relate to one another.

The foundation of social justice and human rights
The basis for dignity, worth and value
Is established right here.

All people, no matter the race, ethnicity, or gender
All are equally created in the image of God
All are precious in God's sight.

Anything or anyone seeking to undermine this critical truth
Goes directly against God's creative intent.

Jim Wallis of Sojourners writes

The deliberately racialized dehumanization of indigenous people for their land, and of stolen Africans to justify our greed in slavery, was America's original sin.

Anything we do to denigrate, diminish, devalue, or disrespect
Anyone's life whether it is done personally or corporately
Is a direct assault on God's Creative intent.

If we, as followers of God seek to be faithful image-bearers
Then we must confront, repudiate, and repent
The evils of racism woven throughout our society.

Racism is a sin against people of color
Perpetrated by white folk.

Again, from Jim Wallis

White Christians, in particular, need to understand that it is their responsibility to dismantle white supremacy.

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I heard this on NPR this past Thursday morning.

A Black pastor in Alabama says he was wrongfully arrested and charged with a crime while he was watering his neighbor's flowers.

Michael Jennings, a longtime pastor at Vision of Abundant Life Church in Sylacauga, Ala., says he was doing a neighborly deed of watering his out-of-town neighbor's flowers, per their request, when a police officer showed up.

"I'm supposed to be here. I'm Pastor Jennings. I live across the street," Jennings told the officer with Alabama's Childersburg Police Department, in newly released body camera footage of his arrest obtained by NPR.

"I'm looking out for their house while they're gone, watering their flowers," he added.

Following their arrival, officers arrested Jennings and placed him in the back of a police cruiser — later charging him with

obstructing government operations, according to a criminal complaint.

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This is certainly not an isolated case.

I am certain most people of color can share similar stories.

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When we white followers of Christ

 Speak of building God's kingdom on earth

 We have to include dismantling white supremacy.

The responsibility to do this is not someone else's

 It is ours.

If it is the whites who benefited directly or indirectly

 From the oppression of people of color

 Then it is we who are responsible to end it.

White pastors must preach the sins of racism from the pulpit.

We must do our best to educate white folk.

We must preach the worth and value of all people.

Racism is a direct affront to God's intention

 For all of humanity to be created in the image of God.

We are "image bearers" of God's love.

This is the work of the church.

This is our work.