

BaptistWay: God

May 22, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for June 7 focuses on Genesis 1:26-31; Romans 5:1-11.*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Well, that’s certainly a better lead in than “It was a dark and stormy night.” And it gets better. God spoke. And things started popping: light, suns, moons, and stars; mountains and seas; gobs of plants and animals to fill the land, the sea, and the air; and then something qualitatively different.

Everything created except one was the materialization of the spoken word of God. Except one. One was much more than mere word. One was the very image of God.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...”

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

God blessed them...

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:26-28, 31).

What are we to make of “the image of God?”

Our first clue is the collective pronoun “our.” “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). In the collective pronoun “our,” we see that to be in God’s image is to be in relationship. God existed in relationship before creation—God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. The Trinity, Three in One. So, to be in God’s image is to be in relationship with another.

Another key feature of being in God's image is freedom. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Creation and Fall*, wrote, "(humans are) like the Creator in that (they are) free." All other created things are subject to natural laws, but humans have the unique capacity of freedom.

Bonhoeffer goes further to define freedom as "being free for the other." And here we turn to the second clue. Not only are we created in the image of a self-relating triune God. We also are created in relation to each other. "Male and female he created them." The blessing of the eternal relationship of the Godhead was not withheld from humanity but was made part of being human, so we are not alone but are free for each other. And thus we are in God's likeness.

It's not all fun and games

"Being free for" means we are responsible. God is responsible for creating us. God is responsible for sustaining us. God is responsible for reconciling us. God does not have to do any of this, but God chooses to as a matter of relationship and is thus responsible, culpable, liable. As beings created in God's image, we also are responsible.

Eugene Peterson wrote it this way:

Let us make human beings ... reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for ..." (Genesis 1:26, *The Message*)

We are not created in God's image so that we can do whatever we want. We are created in God's image as reflections of God's very nature. As a result, we are responsible for creating and not destroying, for sustaining and not diminishing, for reconciling and not condemning (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Reconciling the image

At one time, we were in right relationship with God. We were the unmarred image of God. Then we sinned and disfigured who we are so we no longer recognize ourselves. In fact, we are so confused about who we are that Philip asked, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8).

Jesus responded, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Yes, we are so confused about who we are, we can no longer look in the mirror and see the Father—the image of the Father—in ourselves but need Jesus to say, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

It took God the Son being embodied in human flesh to remind us we are the image of God. This is not mysticism. This is ontology—the way it is. We are the image of God, however unrecognizable.

Because God’s image is disfigured in us by our doing—not God’s—God no longer could relate to us as God intended. Therefore, we either must be cut off or reconciled, and because the disfiguring was our choice, our doing, we must also choose between being cut off or being reconciled.

The choice is only possible, however, because of Jesus.

Just as we did not put God’s image into ourselves, we cannot accomplish the refiguring of ourselves. God put God’s image in us, and God reconstitutes that image in its fullness in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the substance of Romans 5:6-11. We have been reconciled to God through the death of the Son and having been reconciled will be saved through his life.

O love, how deep, how broad, how high,

beyond all thought and fantasy,

that God, the Son of God, should take

our mortal form for mortal's sake.

("O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High" from the *Moravian Book of Worship*)

But not for our sake alone, for God used to walk in the garden with us, and before the last walk was over, God began the work of refiguring what was lost.