

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Sermon for Trinity Sunday, 2017

Genesis 1:26-27

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Genesis 1:26-27: ²⁶ **God said: “Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea, over the flying creatures in the sky, over the domestic animals, and over every kind of animal that crawls on the earth!”** ²⁷ **So God created man in His own image. He created them in God’s image. He created them male and female.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Sometimes you will hear people say something like, “*We’re all made in the image of God.*” I am sure you have all heard that line before, often invoked by those who are demanding equal rights, to demonstrate that we are all equal, that we’re all the same.

But nothing could be further from the truth! In the world today, we are not all equal. Not all life is considered the same. If it was, then there would be no such thing as abortion, for instance. Children still in the womb would have equal rights, yet instead, they aren’t counted that valuable by many. It is estimated that half of all pregnancies in Australia are “unplanned,” and that half of those are terminated. It is said that some 90 000 abortions are carried out each year in our country. Tell me, are those murdered children considered to be equal to everyone else? Again, who’s considered higher? White-collar versus blue-collar? Renter versus homeowner? Even in our personal lives we must decide: Is a person worth our time? our effort? our energy? our money? We determine that some are and some are not.

Today, the world is on edge at the rise of Islamic terrorism, and we pray that this wickedness will be defeated, and we certainly remember those families devastated by the loss of loved ones. Yet even when it comes to compensating the families of the victims of terrorist attacks, again, are all people treated equally? No, because no family receives the same amount of compensation. There is no equality, because determination is made as to what each life was worth. Is a father worth more than a single man? Is a mother worth more than a single woman? Is a younger person's life worth more than someone who is old? And on it goes.

The point in all this is that not everyone is treated as equal. According to our way of living, some people's lives are worth more than others.

In our text, God says, **“Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness,...”** ²⁷ **So God created man in His own image. He created them in God's image. He created them male and female.**

After five days of creating, the stage was set for the climax of God's creative activity. Now on the sixth day of creation, God said, **“Let Us make man.”** Long before we humans ever thought about God, He was thinking about us and making plans for us to share life with Him, to live with Him as members of His family.

God approached the creation of man in a manner different from any of His other creative acts. He gave no simple creative order such as *“Let there be!”* No, before creating the first human, God engaged in solemn deliberation. Note the plurals of our text: **“Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness.”** The New Testament makes it clear that all three persons of the Holy Trinity were active in the work of creation. And in writing the creation account, Moses consistently used language that would be in complete harmony with the information God would subsequently reveal to us about the plurality of persons in the Godhead.

God stated clearly what His purpose was in designing His highest creature: Man was to exercise rule over the rest of the creation. Man was to **rule over**

the fish in the sea, over the flying creatures in the sky, over the domestic animals, and over every kind of animal that crawls on the earth!”

This divine program for the human race makes it clear that God’s human creatures were not just another species of animal. Mankind - male and female - was clearly distinguished from the animals, set apart for a function different from the one the Creator assigned to the lower creatures. We are not descended from monkeys or apes as some would like to believe! (although the way some people behave today, you would think they are descended from monkeys!). Mankind was to manage the earth for God. All the earth’s resources were placed under his jurisdiction. When God blessed the human race, He ordered it to subdue the earth, to rule over it, and He also told man and woman to “*Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth,*” (Gen. 1:28).

The fall into sin has greatly modified man’s dominion over God’s creation. The created world is no longer completely subordinate to fallen mankind. Animals attack and kill man, water drowns him, and finally, earth covers him. However, God’s authorisation to *fill the earth, and bring it under (his) control, to be fruitful and increase in number*, has never been revoked.

“**God created man in His own image.**” It is noteworthy that here, for the third time in this chapter, Moses uses the verb “**created**.” This Hebrew verb is used only when God is the author of an action and only of an action that is unique and unprecedented. Previously Moses had used this verb only when describing God’s creation of the universe, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (1:1), and the first living creatures to move about by their own volition, “*Therefore God created the large sea creatures, every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged creature according to its kind,*” (1:21). However here, this special verb is used to describe the creating of the crown and climax of God’s creative activity. Let it be stated though, that the verb “**create**” does not in itself imply a making out of nothing. God formed the man from the dust of the ground.¹

¹ Genesis 2:7

To equip His first human creatures for the awesome assignment of managing the earth for Him, the Triune God created them **in (His) image, in (His) likeness**. Here is the ultimate evidence that mankind, whom God created **male and female**, is pre-eminent in God's creation. Some Bible students have seen "the image of God" as only a reference to man's humanness, his self-consciousness, his intellect. But that is clearly not the biblical meaning of the term. Even after Adam and Eve fell into sin and lost the divine image, they retained their human personality and their powers of intellect. Again, the image of God cannot describe a physical resemblance to God since God is a spirit.² Rather, the New Testament describes the divine image as a special knowledge, knowing God to be the source of every blessing. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian Church saying, "*put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator,*" (Col. 3:10). The New Testament also describes the divine image as holiness, an absence of sinfulness. Again, the Apostle Paul, this time writing to the Ephesian Church says, "*put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,*" (Ephesians 4:24).

In further trying to understand the concept of the image of God, it may be helpful to describe the effect the divine image had on the personality of Adam and Eve - on their intellect, emotions, and will. Unlike the mental dullness and ignorance we bring with us into the world, Adam and Eve understood perfectly with their intellect what God wanted them to know. While they possessed the image of God, their emotions were also in tune with God's; they found their greatest happiness in God. Before the fall into sin, their will was in complete harmony with God; what He wanted was what they wanted. Every impulse and desire of theirs was in tune with God's good will. Created in the image of God, they were human replicas of what God is like.

Then on the day Adam and Eve sinned, this image of God was lost, and since then, no longer do we fear and love God as we ought. No longer do we have any natural knowledge of God as our loving Father. No longer do we have

² John 4:24

confidence in Him, but we take matters into our own hands. Sin has broken creation. It has broken us. We're different, and we consider others differently. Not wanting to be seen "naked" (Adam, Gen 3:10), or as we are without the image of God, we try to create substitute images for ourselves, masks to hide behind, so that others will think a certain way about us. And so perhaps you've created a religious image or mask, so that people will think you're holier than you really are. Perhaps you have an image or mask of bravery to hide your fear. The cry "*We're all made in the image of God*" is a mask so that you can't condemn me for who I am! And on and on we go. But when all is said and done, we're still broken. We're still sinners. We may be able to hide who we are from each other, but we can't hide this from God. Whatever images we create are poor images indeed.

Yet the God who created man in His image does not leave us fallen and broken.

The God who creates also re-creates, and He is restoring His image in a fallen and broken world. We can try to create images for ourselves, but only God can create something out of nothing - in the beginning and still today. And so, after sin entered the world, after the image of God in us was lost, God acted. The Father sent His Son into the world, the Son who is the true and exact image of God the Father. And the Son of God incarnate shows us true man, without sin. In Jesus, the image that we lost lives. Jesus is the One who knows His Father. Jesus is the One who has complete trust and confidence in His Father. Jesus is the Righteous One.

Yet the Son of God didn't come into the world to restore the image of God in the world for only a time, but for all time. So He takes upon Himself our sin, our punishment and death, our broken image, and in return gives us His Spirit. And through the Holy Spirit, the image of God is again given to us. Through the Holy Spirit, we are re-created, made new, and are being conformed into the image of Christ, who is the image of the Father. This is the work of the Holy Trinity for us. The Father, who sent His Son, who sends the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit, who joins us to the Son, who takes us to the Father.

That work is what this day is all about. We celebrate Holy Trinity Sunday not simply to proclaim who our God is - the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity, although we certainly do that. Today we also proclaim what He has done and is doing for us. We proclaim that the Holy Trinity is applying Himself to the world for the life of the world, for your life and mine. To restore His image in us. To give us what we cannot create. If He didn't give it, we wouldn't have it.

With that understanding we can perhaps look at the words we heard in the Holy Gospel in a new light. Jesus said to "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" (Matthew 28:19). Those words, known commonly as the Great Commission, are not so much about what we are to do as they are about what God the Holy Trinity is doing, what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are doing through His church, applying Himself to the world - making disciples, baptising, teaching, feeding, raising, forgiving, through the means that He has given. The voices and hands and feet may be ours, but the work is our triune God's: His water, His body and blood, His words. Through these means He is restoring, re-creating, giving, making something out of nothing. Creating again children in His image, conforming us to the image of His Son. Yes, as long as we live in a sinful world, that new nature, created in us by the Holy Spirit, must coexist with the sinful image we received from our parents, yet John assures us that, "*When [Christ] appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,*" (1 John 3:2). When believers enter eternal life, the image of God will be completely restored in them.

The terrorist attack in the Garden of Eden caused devastation to our world. It has affected every one of us. The task of recovering what was lost that day fell to one Man, and He determined that each life was worth His own. And so He gave His life for your life. He suffered the shame and nakedness of the cross and then rose from the dust of death, that all who believe in Him shall be raised from the dust of death with Him and live not only forever, but already now, again in the image of God. And after He had completed His task, He said

it need never be done again. It is finished. You are whole. You are healed. You are forgiven and re-created.

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity! Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us! Indeed, that is what this day is all about. The Holy Trinity in mercy giving Himself to us, and we in turn giving glory to Him. Glory to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All praise to the Triune God! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

We praise You, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for You are from everlasting to everlasting. We adore You as the Lord of all, clothed with majesty and honour. We sing Your praise, and humbly bring You our prayers.

We thank You for the truth by which we have come to know You, and for the mercy by which we have come to love You. We thank You for the ability and privilege to praise You, the one, true, eternal, immortal, invisible God in whom we live, move, and exist.

We bless You, heavenly Father, that the universe that you have made is good and wonderful, and that the things that You have made reveal Your power and wisdom.

We worship You, O Christ, only Son of the Father. For when You were lifted up on the cross You drew all people to Yourself, so that whoever believes in You might not die, but have eternal life. We praise You that, at the right hand of the Father, You govern all things for the benefit of Your church. Continue to intercede with the Father for us, Your people.

We praise You, O Holy Spirit that You have called us by the Gospel, and have led us to the saving truth of Jesus the Son. We praise You for gathering us into Your church and making us holy by Your grace. We thank You for making us alive in Christ by Baptism and faith, and for renewing our hearts and lives.

Gracious God, continue to open to us Your Holy Scriptures, that we may grow in our understanding of Your will, serve You more acceptably, and love and obey You better. Give us an ever clearer view of Jesus our Saviour, so that we may rejoice in Your love and mercy more and more, and always trust You completely for everything.

Live in Your Church, O Lord, and make people and pastors eager to fulfil their roles in Your kingdom. Cleanse Your church from all error, weakness, strife, and disobedience. Make us strong in faith and good works, and give us a strong hope in all Your rich promises.

Loving Lord, You have made us Your own; keep us close to You all our days. Give us unceasing joy in Christ's forgiveness and salvation, and confirm us in the new life of the Spirit, until that day dawns, when Your kingdom will come in all its fullness.

Then grant that we may see You face to face, and perfectly love and praise You, our gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the ages to come. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (HOLY TRINITY)

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the water. ³ God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good. God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God named the light "day" and named

the darkness "night." There was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water!"

⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water below the expanse from the water above it. It was so. ⁸ God named the expanse "sky." There was evening, and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let the dry land appear!”

It was so. ¹⁰ God named the dry land “earth,” and He named the gathered water “seas.” God saw that it was good.

¹¹ God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants bearing seeds, and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds in it, each according to its kind!”

It was so. ¹² The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seeds according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seeds in it each according to its kind. God saw that it was good. ¹³ There was evening, and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night! Let them serve as signs to mark feasts, days, and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth!”

It was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the smaller light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in

the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ There was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let flying creatures fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky!”

²¹ Therefore God created the large sea creatures, every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged creature according to its kind. God saw that they were good. ²² God blessed them and said: “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let there be many flying creatures on the earth!”

²³ There was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: domestic animals, crawling animals, and wild animals according to their kinds!”

It was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds,

the domestic animals according to their kinds, and every animal that crawls on the ground according to its kind. God saw that it was good.

²⁶ God said: “Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea, over the flying creatures in the sky, over the domestic animals, and over every kind of animal that crawls on the earth!”

²⁷ So God created man in His own image. He created them in God’s image. He created them male and female.

²⁸ God blessed them and told them: “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, and bring it under your control! Rule over the fish in the sea, the flying creatures in the sky, and over every kind of animal that crawls on the earth.

²⁹ God said: “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the face of all the earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ I have also given every green plant as food to every wild animal, to every flying creature in the sky, and to every animal that crawls on the ground, to everything that has

the breath of life.” It was so. ³¹ God saw all that He had made and, indeed, it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in their entire vast array. ² By the seventh day God had completed the work that He had been doing. Then, on the seventh day, He rested from all His work, which He had done. ³ Therefore God has blessed the seventh day and has set it apart as holy, because on that day He rested from all the work of creation that He had done.

⁴ This is the account of the origin of the heavens and the earth.

Acts 2:14a, 22-26

^{14a} Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them: ...

²² “Men of Israel, listen to these words! Jesus of Nazareth was a Man whom God commended to you, as you yourselves know, by miracles, wonders, and miraculous signs, which God worked among you through Him. ²³ This Man was handed over to you by God’s set plan and foreknowledge, and you,

with the hands of wicked men, nailed Him to a cross and put Him to death. ²⁴ Nevertheless, God raised Him, and loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible for death to hold Him. ²⁵ For David says with regard to Him: ‘I have continually been foreseeing the Lord before Me. For He is at My right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶ For this reason My heart is glad, and My tongue rejoices; yes, even My body will rest in hope. ²⁷ For You will not abandon My soul to Hades, or allow Your Holy One to see decay. ²⁸ You have made the paths of life known to Me. You will fill Me with joy through Your presence.’ ²⁹ Brethren, I can tell you frankly that our ancestor David died and was buried and his grave is with us to this day. ³⁰ Therefore, because David was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him by an oath to cause one of his descendants to sit on his throne, ³¹ he saw what would come, and said concerning the resurrection of the Christ that He was not abandoned to the grave, and that His body did not experience decay. ³² This One,

Jesus, God has raised, and of that fact we are all witnesses.

³³ “Therefore, after He has been lifted up by God’s right hand, and has received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this, which you both see and hear. ³⁴ For it was not David who went up to heaven, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand, ³⁵ until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’”

³⁶ “Therefore all the people of Israel should know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, Lord, and Christ!”

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ When Jesus came near, He spoke to them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and by teaching them to keep all that I have commanded

you! Certainly, I am with you
always, until the end of the age.”