

Our Relational LORD

(6/13/2021)

Scripture 1: (Genesis 1:27; 2:5-9, 15-23)

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

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Scripture 2: (John 17:1-26)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Sermon:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

What does it mean for us to be created “in the image of God”? Our possession of the *Imago Dei* {*the Latin and theologian's fancy way of saying “Image of God”*}, being made like God, in the fashion of God, in His “likeness”, is foundational to who we are as human beings and critical to our understanding of what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29¹; 2 Corinthians 4:4²) through our sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles Paul and Peter both tell us to not be conformed to the ways of the world, not to conform to our old sinful ways (Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 1:14); the way we have been due to the Fall, because of sin, which is not how we were made or created to be, but to instead be restored to God's intention for us through the finished work of Christ, because we have been changed.

Now, we are not yet to Genesis 3 and we have not heard about the first sin and its' consequences, but when Moses wrote “*in the image of God he created him*”, he was writing about our original, intended condition of being “Very Good”; the way we were before we messed things up. Fortunately, even though our sins have marred, ruined, damaged, injured, broken and done great violence to the *Imago Dei* within us, it has never been removed from us or destroyed; a water-damaged painting is still a painting. Fallen, sinful folks that we each are, we are still made in the Image of God; but what does it mean to be an “Image”?

The Hebrew word translated here as “image” is *tselem* (and this is a different word than used in reference to idols for pagan worship), {*or in the Greek is translated from eikon, from which we get the developed theology of “Icons”, particularly as used by the Greek Orthodox Church*}; the given sense of the word is that of an accurate representation of the original or model; possessing the same kind of attributes, being similar to the original but not an exact copy, and particularly here as having the same spiritual, intellectual, moral “likeness” to God, but not a physical “likeness” because “*God is spirit...*” (John 4:24). *Tselem*, “Image” means a facsimile, or a copy like the original, but not the original, it is representative of it, like a print of Vincent Van Gogh's “Starry Night” which you might buy for \$20-\$30; good enough to hang on your wall and perhaps to put into a nice frame, but it is clearly not a master's work. The psalmist uses *tselem* twice (Ps 39:6a[7], 73:20) “*Surely a man goes about as a shadow!...*” (Ps. 39:6 ESV) and “*Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.*” (Ps. 73:20 ESV) likening the *tselem* image to a “shadow” and “phantom”, being similar, representative and related to but lesser than the original; I cannot help but think of Peter Pan's shadow and it's “likeness”.

So, because we are made in the Image of God, we are endowed (by our Creator) with attributes similar to His, but not exactly the same as His; “like” His but to a much lesser degree.

We have been given dominion and authority over creation, to rule over it, for God, as God would will it; but we do not possess the power or authority to have first created it. We have power, but only God is Omnipotent (all powerful). We are here, present in this sanctuary now; but only God is Omnipresent (present in all places, at all times). We have knowledge and understanding; but only God is Omniscient (knowing all things). God is infinite, while we are finite. God is limitless, while we are limited. God is the Creator, while we are the created.

We are like God, but are not God. Representative of God, but still not God.

¹*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* (Rom. 8:29 ESV)

²*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* (2 Cor. 4:4 ESV)

Now, {I will not go into all about what it means to be “made in the Image of God” today, I’m only giving this brief overview because it is something which will come up again and again as we study the Scriptures together. However,} the attribute of God which we reflect, by being made in His Image, that we will focus on today is His “relational nature” and our need for human relationships.

After God made man, God planted a Garden. Then He placed man into the Garden “to work it and keep it”; meaning man was to tend, nurture, help and protect the Garden. Then, the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” (v 2:18). Last week, we heard God say {...it was good...} six times during the week of creation but now God says, “It is not good...” because something was missing; it was not yet, “Very Good” because Adam was alone, without any companionship like him.

This “helper” must be someone very special. The word translated here, from the Hebrew is *ezer*. Aside from here, it is also used {some eighty times within the Old Testament, often in regards to help being provided from the LORD, whether directly or as in military aid (good or bad). As it is used} for God Himself and for the People of God's various historical social or political allies (not that their human allies were ever much of a help). It is not to be assumed that an *ezer* is either greater or lesser than the one being helped; instead our need for an *ezer* emphasizes the insufficiency within us, within the one being helped, when left on our own.

After God had paraded all the animals before Adam, and let him name them, “...there was not found a helper/ (*ezer*) fit for him.” (v 2:20); being “fit for him” means his complement, the one who completes him, filling in his gaps, picking up his slack. So, God made woman to be Adam's *ezer*, his complement and equal; neither greater nor lesser, like him but different³. Together, having been formed from Adam's rib, they (Man and Woman) make a singular, whole.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them....And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Gen. 1:27, 31 ESV)

God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone, because the LORD God Himself is not alone within the Godhead. Adam needed to be in a relationship with other creatures like him, other people; because within the Trinity, the LORD God is in relationship: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The sixth century creed, named for Saint Athanasius, tries to explain this relationship for us, saying, “The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son....And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.”⁴

As all three Persons within the Trinity are co-equal, so too are all people (male and female) created to be equal; and just as we observe the different actions and works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within Scripture and the world around us, so too will each man and woman, (believer or not), differ in our functions and actions in life and in the ministry of the church (1 Corinthians 12).

Like God, we are made to live and work together in community, in relationships. The poet {and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London}, John Donne [1572-1631], expressed this idea so well in popular verse writing, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...”⁵.

3 Matthew Henry's Commentary - “That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

4 <https://www.rca.org/about/theology/creeds-and-confessions/the-athanasian-creed/>

5 <https://allpoetry.com/No-man-is-an-island>

The LORD God is in relationship and in a community within Himself, among all three Persons; therefore, we were created to reflect that as a people, as His creation, because we are still made in the Image of God, even when damaged and imperfect.

We are not meant to be alone. We need to be in relationships with others: our friends and family, husbands and wives, members within a believing congregation. Other people are a gift to us, and we should be a gift to them; but the rule today, in our modern culture, is dis-unity, instead of community. Our great enemy, Satan, and the sinful nature within us, constantly work to divide us, one from another; to divide and keep us separated from God, from Jesus Christ, and the Church; so, we must remain diligent and intentional about all our relationships.

The Apostle Peter wrote, “...*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” (1 Pet. 5:8 ESV); and how do lions hunt? A lion {*like wolves*} will chase the herd, the group, the community upon which they prey, until they can separate one animal (or person) from the rest, remove them from the safety of their common defense. Then they will pounce and go on the attack.

Kohaleth, the Teacher, Solomon, wrote in Ecclesiastes, “*And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him-- a threefold cord [or three pencils] is not quickly broken.*” (Eccl. 4:12 ESV). There is safety and security when we are united together with others, united to the whole, and not separate or alone. This togetherness and unity in relationships applies to both our lives in the world and to our spiritual lives, because the Good News is we have a great Hope and Helper; not just because we have each other, but because we have Jesus Christ, who is the One uniting us together; He unites us to Himself, and into the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

{*Remember that while the word “Trinity” is nowhere found within sacred Scripture, the implication and presence of the Three-in-One is seen throughout.*} Now, the Gospel of John as a whole, is clearly the most Trinitarian book of the Bible, describing the relationships between, and the differing works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nowhere is this understanding more clear than across the “Upper Room Discourse” (of John chapters 13-17), with Jesus discussing His imminent return to the Father, and His future sending of the Holy Spirit to be our *paraclete*: our Comforter, Helper, and Advocate; to the disciples, from Himself and from the Father.

This unity and equality between God the Father and God the Son, Jesus, is repeatedly emphasized within our passage {some seven-ish times} of John 17. Moreso, Jesus prays for our unity, the unity of all believers; that we will be united together in and with Him and the Father {also some seven-ish times} now, and in heaven, and in the world to come. He prays that we will be united together in love and fellowship, one to another, as believers, in Him.

During this discourse, during His final Passover meal with His closest friends and disciples, Jesus has continued to teach them, revealing the Truth of Who He Is in the most clear terms: Philip asked “Show us the Father” to which Jesus replied, “If you've seen Me, then you've seen the Father.” (14:8-11), {*a referent to the Imago Dei of His human nature, which Paul further expands in Colossians 1:15⁶*}; and just before our passage, the disciples finally started to truly understand Him, saying, “*Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!*” (Jn. 16:29 ESV) to which Jesus responded, “*Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*” (Jn. 16:31-32 ESV), continuing and concluding with the point and purpose for His “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17, “*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.*” (Jn. 16:33 ESV)

The unity and community that Jesus has with the Father and the Holy Spirit is our source of peace. Peace, true peace, the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, is not the absence of conflict, or safety and freedom from fear, but is in its purest form, both simple and complex, *shalom* is: wholeness, completeness, having a sense of harmony with

6 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Col. 1:15 ESV)

each other and the Divine, to whom we are united by the Holy Spirit. *Shalom* is an attribute of God that we, as His Image, also reflect, participate in, possess, and enjoy; *shalom* is why it was “...*not good for man to be alone...*”, we cannot experience *shalom*, alone.

We often find it easy to focus on our many differences, to allow them to divide us; to believe we have nothing in common with each other; whether it be our politics and other preferences, or our different church denominations and other social groups. We forget or ignore the greatest and most important commonality we have as Christians, greater than the *Imago Dei* (which we share with all people): we forget that we are united together, in Christ, with God – us and all believers in the LORD, YHVH, Jesus; all of the elect saints of the church, back to Adam and Eve and forward to our children's children's children (*ad infinitum*) until Christ returns and consummates His Kingdom on earth.

Whatever Jesus prays for, we can be sure is answered, and is answered with a resounding “Yes!”. Jesus, in this prayer, prays for Himself: for His eternal glory, not for His sake but for ours, so that He might glorify His Heavenly Father by His work (on the cross) and that we may join Him, together, in glorifying our Heavenly Father (in obedience and worship) as the LORD's beloved: the adopted children of His Sovereign Will and Choice.

Jesus prays for His disciples: for their faith and belief in Him; for their faithfulness, offering thanksgiving for their past faithfulness and asking the Father for perseverance in their future; for their sanctification in and by the Truth, Which and Who is Christ; that they be consecrated, made holy, by Christ's consecration: by, through, and in His holiness. He prays that their joy, will be His Joy: the Joy which God has in His people and in His creation; the joy which comes from the truth and not the despair which comes of the lies coming from the world.

Jesus prays for us, for all believers, His elect: who were and are yet to come; that we would be blessed, and believe in Christ by our hearing the words of the Apostles, the words of the faithful disciples who came before us {*our pastors, our ancestors, the Reformers or other historical church leaders*}, through the passing on and down of His Truth, which sanctifies us. That we will be glorified with Him and those who came before us, so that we may glorify the LORD forever; that we will experience His Joy, and enjoy Him forever. That we know we are loved; as the Father loves the Son, so too He loves us, because we are united together with Him as children of God.

Jesus prays that the love we receive from Him, is used and shown to others among us, and to those beyond us, out there in the world. He prays that by our loving others in our many relationships, that by our loving everyone, that the world will know Christ is in us and we are in Him. To know that the reason for our loving others, is because Christ has first loved us (Romans 5:8)⁷. “...and they'll know we are Christians by our Love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.”

Without others, without one another, who can we love? How can we love? “*It is not good for man to be alone...*” We need someone like us to love. We need someone like us to be loved by. We need our *ezer*, and we need to be someone else's *ezer*.

The LORD made us for relationships and to be in community. He desires for us all to be in a relationship with Him, and each other. This is why God the Son, Jesus Christ took on flesh: was born, lived, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven; to restore us and bring us back into a right relationship with our Father, as His children.

“*But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in [Christ's] name, [Jesus] gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*” (Jn. 1:12-13 ESV)

⁷but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8 ESV)

The LORD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; love one another and the LORD loves you. We are made to love others, and to be loved by others. By loving others, we express the love the LORD has for us, and so doing, we express our love for Jesus.

Coming out of this season of COVID, when many of us have felt isolated or alone; many of us have unintentionally become “islands”, but now it is time for us all to rejoin the mainland. We have plenty of opportunities within the local community and in this congregation, for us all to regather:

- The Rotary Club is meeting again (thank you to Harold Davis for inviting me);
- Friends are safely gathering together again for meals in restaurants;
- Many community Club Houses are re-opening for activities and for hosting events.
- We have been supporting “People Helping People” for a while now, perhaps some of us could do more than just bring groceries to church? Perhaps some one (of ya'll) might want to deliver them to the mission downtown, and then spend time visiting with folks?;
- The Coffee Hour following our worship service is returning (June 20th) and we need volunteers to sign up and provide the treats and serve during this time of fellowship.
 - This is a great opportunity for different people to partner up, help each other, and work together to lighten the load; maybe one person brings the snacks while the other prepares the drinks, or maybe one provides the goodies while the other sets up and cleans up afterwards? “Many hands make light work”, right?;
- We have the Rummage Sale coming up next month and we still need people to help set things up, tear things down, and work the sale itself.
 - Everything we do to help make this Rummage Sale a success, is a help for our local ministry; this sale is not raising money for this church, all of the proceeds go out to help others.
- Then, we have Fellowship meals resuming in July, Ms Sonya will have more information and details for us all, soon;

Then, as we start living and working together again in Christian fellowship and love, then we can resume our mutual discipleship in the faith; teaching and learning from one another, supporting and encouraging one another in our daily walks with Christ.

- “Joy in the Morning” had been meeting on Tuesdays, until recently and will resume again in the Fall;
- We've had the Sunday morning study going through the Apostle Paul's letters, which is also currently “on pause”.
- We have a new study group starting next month, the “Spirit Seekers”, for folks in our 20's, 30's and 40's (please see Ms Carrie Troyer, Ms Ashley Scott, or myself for more information);
- Soon, I plan on starting a mid-week Bible Study, open to everyone, here at the church. We still need to decide on a time to start; I need to know when ya'll will come.
- ...and I'm sure that as time goes on we will have even more opportunities!

So, remember that you are made in the Image of God. You are made for this; made for building and strengthening our relationships in a God honoring way, for His Glory and Christ's Kingdom. We have a lot of work to do and we cannot do it alone; but, the Good News is, the LORD has given us *ezer's* to help, and He has made us all to be *ezer's* ourselves, because He is our True *ezer*.

Go! Help and be helped. Live together in community; strengthen your bonds by fellowship and faithful discipleship. Develop your relationships in *shalom* and love.

You are made in God's Image. You represent Him, you represent Christ to those around you. Help them come into a greater relationship with you, and our heavenly Father. Introduce them to our Relational LORD.

AMEN

APPENDIX:

The Athanasian Creed (6th Century)

Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.

Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.

For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another.

But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.

What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit.

Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit.

The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite.

Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.

Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty.

Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.

As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits.

And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.

Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.

It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.

For this is the true faith that we believe and confess: That our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.

He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother — existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body; equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity.

Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ.

He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity.

He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures.
 For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.
 He suffered death for our salvation. He descended into hell and rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life, those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith.

One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.

No Man Is an Island

John Donne [1572-1631], Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London

No man is an island, Entire of itself;
 Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,
 As well as if a promontory were: As well as if a manor of thy friend's
 Or of thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind.
 And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.



Illustration 1: "Starry Night" by Vincent van Gogh