

IMAGO DEI

PSALM 8

Trinity Sunday | June 7, 2020
Community CRC | Kitchener ON

Sisters and brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, it is difficult for anyone to overstate just how important the creation of humankind is in the biblical story of God's creation of the world. From the cosmic poetry of Genesis 1 to the more intimate prose of Genesis 2, from the musings of Job to the poetry of the psalmists, the creation of human beings is the crown, the pinnacle, the climax of the creation story. And as the psalmist remarks in our passage for today, this really is incredible, when you consider the great scope of creation. In the grand scheme of the universe, the majesty of the cosmos, what is humanity? What are human beings? That the God who made all this would pay us any mind at all, would count us as anything more than animated dust?

But God does. And that's what this Psalm celebrates. God remembers us. God minds us. God counts us. God cares for us. God makes us rulers over his creation, giving it over into our care to steward and tend it—all flocks and herds and beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the sea—all living things in heaven and on earth, given into the care of humankind.

The Psalmist is clear: God has a special purpose for humanity, and God cares for human beings in a special way, unique in all creation. The relationship God has with his human creatures is unique. It is special, intimate, personal.

We see this truth reflected, in different ways, in every telling of the creation story that we have throughout the scriptures. In Genesis 1, this cosmic song of the creation of the world, after all that God has made—light and darkness, sky and land and sea, trees and grass and birds and fish and animals—God says, *“Let us make humankind in our own image, in our own likeness.”* So God made humanity in his image; in the image of God he created it; male and female, he created them. God made humanity to *be like him*, to reflect God's own self. And we call this biblical teaching by its Latin name, the *Imago Dei*, the Image of God.

In Genesis 2, we are given an even more intimate scene to complement and balance the cosmic grandeur of Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, we see the creator God, stooping down into the mud to shape and mould a human body from the dust of the earth with his own hands.

And once he has crafted the human creature into its form, God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and he becomes a living soul. Made in the Image of God; patterned after the likeness of God; filled with the breath of God.

The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

It's hard to read stories like this in our current reality. To read about the breath of God giving life to the first man when we watch with horror, over and over again, our brothers and sisters cry out "I can't breathe." We read in scripture that God created humankind to be special, to be like him. We read that God made human beings in his image, and we confess that this *Imago Dei* gives every human person intrinsic dignity and worth, that because they carry in their being the Image of God himself, their life matters.

And yet we find ourselves in a perfect storm of inhumanity that threatens to expose as absolute fantasy the conviction that every life has dignity, that every person has intrinsic worth. As this pandemic ravages the world, in a time when we might have expected people to come together in unity and common purpose, what we are seeing is the rage of people who have long been told that their lives do not have intrinsic worth. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arberry, Breonna Taylor—Black Americans killed without trial have brought the attention of the world to the Black Lives Matter movement, demanding that the governments of the United States (and Canada) recognize the disparities in law enforcement, conviction, incarceration, and most especially unjustified killings in black and brown communities. Long term care homes, like Forest Heights Revera, have been hard-hit by the pandemic, bringing the attention of the whole nation to the fact that we have not treated our elders with dignity or respect, but have commodified their care as yet another efficient fix to spur productivity for the great economic machine. And just this week, we saw the anger and pain of indigenous voices across this country as the federal government announced a last-minute delay in the release of the action plan responding to the report on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, which just last year found that the government of Canada is actively complicit in an ongoing programme of genocide against indigenous people. In all of these examples in our society, the Image of God is dishonoured, defaced, destroyed, and we rightly respond with sadness, with anger, with lament, and even with rage.

Maybe some of you posted on social media this week, blacking out your profile pictures or posting links to educational resources. Maybe some of you attended the march in downtown Kitchener on Wednesday, or watched it online. Maybe some of you donated to a charity or nonprofit that is working to remedy these social inequities. Maybe some of you wrote or called your MP or MPP to advocate for one or all of these dehumanizing realities. Maybe some of you fell to your knees in prayer, in lament, in intercession, lifting all of this up before God.

People have commented that it seems like we are living through the apocalypse, and I find that to be an incredibly appropriate word, because the Greek word apocalypse means “revelation,” or more literally “unveiling” or “exposing.” Apocalypse, in the Greek, doesn’t mean the end of the world, it means the uncovering of what was previously hidden, which, when it comes to the lies that the powers of this world try to convince us are true, might be a sort of “end of the world.” And the moment that we find ourselves in is certainly apocalyptic. So much is being revealed, so much is being laid bare. Our supply chains are exposed, the systems and structures on which we have unquestioningly come to depend lay in plain sight, the black and brown bodies commodified as “essential services” in meat packing plants, delivery services, factories, and long term care homes confront us every day and force us to face the fact that we are complicit in a sinful system that privileges some and disenfranchises others. It exposes for us that no action is neutral. Actions are Christian or anti-Christian, racist or anti-racist, humanizing or dehumanizing. Nothing is neutral.

Let me give you an example: This past Wednesday was the protest march in downtown Kitchener. Ashley and I wanted to go, but since we’ll be travelling in a few weeks we decided we couldn’t risk the exposure. Instead, we sat on the front porch and encouraged protesters as they walked down our street to the march, made a donation, and watched the rally online. All good anti-racist actions. But because it was a heavy day, because we were both emotionally and spiritually worn out, because I was tired, I made the decision to order pizza instead of cooking dinner. And, of course, when I go out to pay for the pizza, the person delivering my family’s dinner is a black man, who probably would have preferred to be at the march, and probably never had a chance. Was it a sin for me to order pizza during a civil rights march? No. But was it a “neutral” action? Definitely not. It exposed yet another

way in which I live my day-to-day complicit in a racist and sinful system that dishonours the *Imago Dei* in my fellow image-bearers.

But these moments of apocalypse, of revelation, shouldn't unduly discourage us. Rather, as scripture teaches us, we ought to receive them as gifts from God to make changes to our habits and patterns of living. We are called, always, to be *attentive* to our own spiritual lives, to regularly engage ourselves in self-reflection to identify the places in our lives where we have grown blind, where we have developed hard hearts, where we have absorbed the lies and illusions of the powers of this world that prejudice us against our fellow image-bearers. We confess that no area of our life is unaffected by sin, but we so often act as though we have nothing to repent of, so in moments of revelation, when God reveals to us ways that we are complicit in sin, or actively participating in sin, we ought to thank God for opening our eyes.

And we ought to be *active* in our response. Awareness of our sin is not enough, as scripture teaches us very clearly. Revelation of sin, or of participation in sinful structures, should always lead us to action—to confession, to repentance, to lament, to reconciliation, and to repair. Once our eyes are opened to sin in our lives and in the world, we shouldn't try to cover that up or try and justify it to ourselves or others, we should learn more, dig deeper, expose more. We should seek out those who will continue to challenge us to grow and develop into more holy and righteous and just people of faith. We should seek out those who are victims of the sinful systems we are a part of and build relationships with them so that we do not fall back into habits of apathy and complacency. We should be active in following the Spirit's leading to our spiritual rehabilitation.

And finally, we have to be *specific* in both our actions and our words. Scripture itself shows us that it is not enough to say that God loves everybody or that all people are created in God's image or that all lives have dignity. In the Old Testament, God could have told his people, "build a just society that looks out for everyone," but he didn't. He said, "care for the orphan and the widow, the foreigner in your midst." Why? Because the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner were the ones at risk of exploitation and oppression. In the New Testament, Jesus could have simply said, "I came to bring salvation to all," but instead he says, "I have come to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoner, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed." Why? Because the poor, the prisoner, the blind,

and the oppressed are precisely those who the powerful overlook and dehumanize. God calls us to name and speak up on behalf of the vulnerable and the marginalized—on behalf of Black lives, on behalf of Indigenous lives, on behalf of the lives of the elderly—because when the vulnerable and marginalized are honoured and cared for, treated with dignity and respect, only then can we truly say all are valued.

Sisters and brothers, here is the truth of things: only Christ has the power to defeat the powers of this world, to establish a stronghold against the enemy that will endure unto eternity. The societal and structural machinations of injustice, try as we might to topple them by our own efforts, will finally only be brought down by the return of our Lord as judge. We will not bring about the Kingdom of God by our actions; no matter how hard we strive, we may not even bring about a more just society. But we are citizens already now of the Kingdom of God that is coming, and as citizens of that Kingdom we are called already now to live in light of the promises that God has made. By our actions—our repentance, our lament, our reconciliation, our small steps toward fixing the brokenness of this fallen world—we witness to the glory of our Creator God, “O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” We witness to the mercy of our great Redeemer, “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” We witness to the coming Kingdom, the Kingdom of justice and peace, the Kingdom that is already within us through the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom where God will dwell with his people. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” For “I am making all things new!” Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.