

Sermon 11-9-22 - In the Beginning (AS)

Matthew 8: 18-27 and Genesis 1:24 – 2:22

Good morning, how I wish that I was preaching to you today under different circumstances. We find ourselves as a nation in mourning for the loss of a much-loved Queen who reigned over this Nation for most, if not all our lifetimes.

Just as every building is supported by a solid foundation, and the scriptures as a canon are supported by a book from the beginning which relates to the origins of the world, so this country has for the past seventy years been reigned over by a Monarch that provided much-needed stability through the many challenges that have been faced. Through them all we were able to look to the one unchanging anchor point, the late Queen. Perhaps our sense of loss can find an echo in the grief felt by the Israelites when Moses died, and they mourned.

We should also not forget that there is a family that is mourning, and I hope that they and especially King Charles may over time find comfort in the words of God to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” This encouragement shows the love of God towards humanity.

The reading from Genesis this morning focuses on the creation of humans in the image of God. Theologians have put forward many distinct reasons why this is the case and I want to share two with you this morning.

The first human Adam is created from the dust of the ground which in Hebrew is Adamma.

This first human is made from already-created material formed by the hand of God in love and this is reflected in Isaiah where he writes “Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

We are told three times that God created humans “in God’s image.” We are the only part of creation that has been blessed by God in this way.

But what exactly does it mean that humans are made in God’s image?

That is something that theologians have argued about over the centuries, but perhaps part of the answer is found in verse 26 where God said, “Let us make humans in our image,” and then follow the words, “after our likeness.” I think the essential element of being in God’s image is that humans are able to reflect “God-likeness.”

It is not possible for finite human beings to reflect the eternal, infinite nature of God completely or accurately.

But with personality, intelligence, and ability to know and relate to God, humans able to reflect God-likeness in a limited way.

Ephesians 4 may help us to understand a little more of what being made in the image of God might entail.

Paul says that a Christian has “put on their new self which has been created in God’s image — in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.” He tells us that righteousness, holiness, and truth are all included in what it means to be created in the image of God.

As Christians, knowing that all people are made in God’s image, we must endeavour to treat all people with dignity and respect regardless of gender, regardless of race, regardless of age, nationality, or economic status because we remember Jesus’ words that whatever we do for “the least of these members of my family, you did also to me”. And we do all of this out of a love for God and a concern for those who bear his image.

As has so often been said, the Queen was able to make the people she met feel special. She treated people with dignity, and this is why so many people grew to love and respect her.

We also need to reflect God’s image in every aspect of our lives, to act, speak and show love to others in a way that furthers God’s work in our community.

God created us to reflect his image. This links to the other reason God created humans I want to share today; that is to have a role in overseeing creation.

After God said, “Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness,,” he then said, “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

The word “dominion” suggests the right to rule, to govern, to control, to dominate. But with that freedom comes responsibility. First of all, humans were not given authority over all things in heaven and on earth. While humans were given authority by God to have dominion over creation, it is important that we never forget that humans are not God.

We should not exercise authority over creation in a way that is self-serving. Rather, God intended that humans exercise authority over this world in a way that brings honour and glory to God, the one who put us in this position. And our role is to shape creation so that it is an appropriate part of God’s larger kingdom.

As humans are made in the image and likeness of God, and the fact that we were given dominion over all the earth are very closely related. In fact, humans were created in the image of God so that they could exercise dominion over all the earth.

God made us to be like him, so that we can try to become more like him. As God's image-bearers in creation, it was God's intention that we act as his representatives. We were designed by God to show the world what God is like.

So, when God gave us the command to rule over this earth, the expectation was that we would do so in a way that reflects his character.

This was God's intention, but all you have to do to look around at this world and it is clear we are not living in paradise anymore. There are some beautiful things in our world, but we have also made a mess of a lot of it. Rather than using our dominion to take care of this earth, we have chosen to conquer it instead. However, all is not lost, and we should work together to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

However, dominion is not all about how we treat the environment. It involves how we interact with the world around us, but it is so much more than that. Dominion touches every part of our being.

And a big part of having dominion over creation is working to spread the kingdom of God so that this world begins to look increasingly like the larger kingdom of God.

Humans were created in the image and likeness of God so that God's kingdom might be advanced on this earth. So that worship of God might be promoted. So that this world might come to see more and more of God's love.

Psalm 8 reflects how much of a mystery God's love is, "what are human beings that you should be mindful of them, mortals that you should be mindful of them." This wonderful love is the love we need to show to others.

We were created in the image and likeness of God and given dominion, not so that we might promote the advancement of our kingdom, but so that we might further the kingdom of God here on this earth.

Adam and Eve, having been made in God's image, were to work towards the establishment and expansion of a culture on earth where their offspring would worship and serve their Creator, just as they were created to do.

And as we exercise our dominion in this world, we do so not harshly, but with love, grace, and service. Just as our late Queen, Queen Elizabeth did. This was a reign that embodied the very best examples of love, grace, and service from its unexpected beginning in 1952 right until the end.

Perhaps we miss her so deeply because in her life of service we saw a reflection of the image of God, and his love for all humanity.