

Sermon – June 7, 2020
“In the Image of God”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Amen

Good morning everyone. This summer I am planning to preach primarily from the Old Testament. This morning’s scripture reading is the beginning of our Bibles, the beginning of the revealed word, and hence, the beginning of our knowledge about the nature of God. It is also the beginning of our journey through the Old Testament, or at least a journey from creation to the Exodus. We will not have time to look at every event in the Old Testament, but will focus on some of the key steps in this journey.

I remember the first time that I had a conversation with a person who had a young earth view. That is a view that creation spans seven 24-hour days, and then they calculate the age of the earth from the chronology found in the Bible. I had never thought about creation in that manner before that conversation. That conversation set me off on a journey that is still ongoing today. The only solid conclusion I have drawn so far is that we should start with God as our focus and look at creation from that point of view and not from a science view that seeks to take God out of creation. I will also hold that Genesis is not a scientific document. It may have insight for us into scientific discovery about the creation of the earth, but it does not give great scientific details about creation. If it did, then God would be constantly rewriting Genesis so it reflected our latest, ever changing understanding of the universe, of God’s creation.

Verse one of Genesis is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible, “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,” One of my former coworkers who is an ardent baseball fan held that this verse documented that God was a baseball fan. He would quote this as, “in the big inning.” I use his words to help us understand that often we read into Genesis what we believe and not what the words actually say. Our goal, as we read God’s word, is to put these words into the context of an ancient people who were seeking to tell their understanding of

creation. They were seeking to share with future generations what they understood about God and how to answer the question of “Why are we here?” and “What is our purpose?” This opening statement also serves as a summary of what is to follow in this chapter about the creation of the heavens and the earth. There is not time on our journey to cover every day of creation in great detail, so this morning we will look quickly at day one and day six.

I also see Genesis as the beginning of not only the heavens and the earth, but of an ongoing story of God’s relationship with humanity. It is a story that extends through all of the Bible. Throughout this summer, it is my intention to take us on a journey through some of the Old Testament parts of this most wonderful story ever told. We will also be restarting a Bible study on Thursday mornings at Fairfields that will look more in depth at the Old Testament. Let me encourage you to join that study and dive deeper into God’s astonishing story. I would also encourage you to read through the first two books of the Bible this summer. I will also offer that if anyone is interested in looking at creation in more detail that I am always interested to sit down to read and study creation and look at the volumes of ideas and information that have been and are being generated about this topic. Nothing I have yet read satisfactorily explains all of the nuances of this text. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch and let’s join together to look more deeply at God’s word and the days of creation.

Before God begins creation, we have a picture of a formless void. This is a picture of chaos. At the beginning of creation, there is no ordered heaven and earth, and into this formlessness God speaks the words, “Let there be light,” and there was light, and God looks and sees that the light was good. What we should notice here is that God speaks and creation occurs. God’s first work is to create light. The sun and the moon will not arrive until day four, so this light is from another source, one related to God. Notice the statement at the end of the day, a statement associated with all of the days of creations, “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” What we see in this first day of creation is the beginning of God’s creation to emerge from chaos into the ordered creation that conforms to God’s will and purpose. The arrival of light into the formless void is the beginning of a new order. Notice that God does not create darkness. The light and darkness are separated into ordered units called days. Order from chaos begins with God’s first act of ordering the creation of light.

Notice again the statement that ends the acts of God on day one. “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” God has separated the light and the darkness into night and

day, but on this first day there is no morning, only a formless void into which God speaks. With the creation of light and the separation of day and night, God establishes a pattern of this basic measure of time, day and night. With the coming of this light on day two, we are assured that what God has started with the ordering of creation will continue. This statement continues throughout the creation account making clear to us that what God has set up will continue. God's creation is not a temporary result, but a lasting result until God's will and purpose are completed.

We should also notice the sequence of creation. God speaks and then God sees and what he sees is that what He creates is good. This is the idea that it is complete; the arrival of light is a complete aspect of God's creation. There will be no more need to order this aspect of creation, and this ordering will continue, sustained by God's creative action.

We are now going to skip a lot of creation and dwell on part of day six and the creation of humanity for a few moments this morning. Again, on day six God speaks, but this time God's words do more than speak humanity into creation. God gives instructions and establishes a mission for humanity. But first, we need to notice that God creates humankind in His image; the words are "into our likeness." We are created male and female, those who bear the image of God. This separates humankind from all of the animals as this is the only time during God's creation, during God's ordering of chaos, that this statement occurs. Humankind alone bears this aspect of God, the image of God. We need to discover and decide what it means to be made in God's image. There is no short list given in scripture that concisely defines what this means. Instead, we need to begin to seek to understand what we are capable of grasping about the nature of God, and then translate that knowledge into a more complete creation who bears God's image. We are not able to be God, no matter how we might desire that, but being image bearers gives to humankind the capacity to serve as God's servants in His ordered creation. This is the ability to be and to act like God, to act on His part in His Creation. We also have the ability to grow into a more complete manifestation of God's image. This comes from a growing knowledge of who God is and how we are to live in His creation so that we honor His image. As we journey through the Old Testament this summer, we will uncover more and more of who God is and how we should seek to grow into that understanding. The idea of image bearer means that we, like God, are not made to be subordinated in creation, but are to be those who have dominion in the same nature God does. We must keep in mind that Jesus is the complete revelation of what it means for humankind to bear the image of God. Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col

1:15). Jesus is then not a physical representation of what God looks like, but a physical representative of God in the flesh. We are to grow into this image of God as it is revealed completely in Christ.

Notice that part of being an image bearer gives humankind a unique mission for their place in creation. Humankind is to have dominion over the earth and all that is in it, all of creation. This is not to be an abusive, exploitive role, but one that is carried out as God has ordained, as one who brings order out of chaos and sustains creation. God also gives humankind a blessing and a mission telling them to “Be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it.” God in the beginning sends humankind to fill the earth with images of the Creator.

With these directions, God looks at creation, at the ordering of chaos, and sees all that He has made and sees that it is very good. This is the only time that God uses this term, “very good” for creation. With the creation of humankind, God’s creation work is complete and it is very good. Chaos is no longer formless and void. It is filled with order and purpose, God’s purpose. Before we leave creation, the ordering of chaos, we need to look forward into the New Testament and again listen to Jesus’ instructions given to his disciples just before his ascension: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” We should hear in Jesus’ parting instructions a restatement of God’s original purpose for humankind, to go and make disciples of all nations, making them, through the power and work of God, through the gift on the cross of Jesus, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, into image bearers of God. That Jesus restates this mission means that somewhere humankind lost God’s mission, that somewhere along the development of humanity their purpose to fill the earth with images of God has been corrupted. We will look at that moment next week as we journey through the Old Testament. We need to remember that we are not alone as we go out into God’s mission, but will have Jesus with us through the Holy Spirit to complete God’s mission for humanity. Let’s go forth and work in God’s mission as those being recreated into Jesus’ image, the image of God. We also need in this time and place to seek to see the image of God in others. We tend to focus on other attributes in the people we meet, but if we will approach everyone with this idea as our foundation for interaction, we will find that we treat others much differently. We may need to search deeply in order to be able to find a glimpse of

God's image in others, but if we will look and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, we will find our eyes opened and, like God, we will see the image placed at creation into all humankind. When we seek to find this image in our neighbors, we too will be able to say with God that everything we see that He has made is very good. This is a much-needed practice in these days of protest and riot. Search for the image of God and take that image in each person as the basis for our interaction, for the words that come forth from our mouths, for the seeing of the people of God.

Pray with me: Father God, I thank you for the ordering of chaos that I live in each day. Lord, guide me to be one who sees Your image in each person and bases my interaction with them upon that image. Lord, help me to go out into your mission to spread Your image to all of creation. Jesus, go with me and be present as you guide my journey into your mission. Amen