

“In God’s Image”  
Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, October 22, 2017  
Exodus 33:12-23 (Genesis 1:26)     Matthew 22:15-22  
First Presbyterian Church of Sandpoint, Idaho  
Pastor Andy Kennaly

I arrived at Dublin, Ireland a day before Shawna did. A man named Patrick had also been a guest at Glenstal Abbey, and he was heading home to Dublin so he drove me the two and a half hours and dropped me off right downtown at Trinity College, where I was staying in the heart of the city. The next afternoon Shawna was coming so I needed to get out to the airport, which was well north of the city. There is an airport shuttle bus that leaves every twenty minutes or so from downtown, and it only cost 8 Euros to ride it. The line at the bus stop was tremendous as the bus pulled up, and I was near the end of the line. Another bus pulled up behind and it also said AIRPORT on its sign, so I quickly moved to get on that one. As I was one of the first to step on that one, the Irish driver said directly, “Tree Turty.” The image of trees crossed my mind and I asked him to say it again. “Tree Turty.” Another dazed look on my face, and then it sunk in that he was saying, “Three-thirty.” But in my mind I thought he was talking about the time. Was it three thirty? No, it was just after two. Would the bus arrive at the airport at three thirty? No, that couldn’t be it. “Oh, it cost three-thirty to ride this bus!” I finally figured this out as the line of people was piling up behind me. I handed him a five note. “We don’t take notes. If you want to use notes, ride that bus,” as he pointed to the overfull bus ahead of us which still had a line spilling out onto the sidewalk. I knew my pocket was full of change, but I stepped off the bus to let the crowd file by, strollers and all, as I fumbled out “Tree-Turdy” in exact change. I stepped back on the bus and put it in the counter. “Found some change did ya’?” he said as he handed me my ticket. I went and found a seat on the upper level. That bus was cheaper because it was a City Bus rather than a direct shuttle. We stopped dozens of times through all these little neighborhoods, and about half way there it broke down and we had to switch buses. I got the same spot on the other bus and eventually we made it all the way to the airport. It was actually enjoyable seeing parts of Dublin I may not have seen otherwise, and I still had time to spare, plus Shawna’s plane was over an hour late anyway. After she landed, the two of us took the direct shuttle back to town, and the helpful drivers made sure we got on the right bus and off at the correct stop.

This morning we read scriptures that has language we may not catch at first, and most people approach from an exact change mentality, where you’re either on or off their bus. But if you approach them that way, you lose a lot in translation. Looking at passages like the one from Exodus through a literal hearing of the English renditions leads to dramatic scenes in Hollywood movies, such as Indiana Jones as the Ark of the Covenant is opened and he survives because he closes his eyes. “No one shall see me and live,” we hear God tell Moses. A superficial reading hears this as saying, if you keep your eyes open, they will melt and your head explodes, according to Hollywood. “Close your eyes!” as Dr. Jones survives that scene of God’s glory blowing by with a great, fiery wind.

In the Hebrew, Wisdom tradition, passages like this from Exodus are a literary narrative, a story that uses details not as literal truth but as illustrations of spiritual truths. The intention of these stories is to communicate God’s relationship with creation and how we participate in that relationship, how we relate with God. “No one shall see me and live,” has more to do with the

reality that when we experience God, when we are aware of God in our midst and actively at work in the world, our lives are changed, our hearts are transformed, and our minds are renewed. You will not live as you lived before! Your life will be different. Encountering God, heeding God's invitation to awareness, and experiencing God's love changes everything!

In Genesis 1:26, we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image.'" Again, this is a literary narrative, sharing deep truths over deep time, drawing us in as we share loving relationship with God and discover our part of a larger creation. The Hebrew tradition shares wisdom as it says, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness,'" and it goes on to talk about dominion over all sorts of creatures, not in a domination way that exploits creation for profit and personal gain, but as those having responsibility for providing care and protection, partnering with creation in regenerative ways. This is dominion practiced by those made in God's image.

In Matthew's Gospel we are also invited to hear the subtle cues as Jesus makes a play on words for those who have ears to hear. The trap seems certain because of the strange aligning of the Herodians and the Pharisees. The Herodians support Empire oppression, and they represent Roman occupation. The Pharisees represent the occupied, those who are oppressed by Rome, including the common people of the area, those who a few days earlier cheered Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. The trap would likely either have the people become hostile as they change their support of Jesus into active opposition, or get Jesus into trouble with the Roman authorities. If Jesus supports paying taxes, he supports the oppressors, and if he says not to pay taxes, then he's supporting a rebellion, and the authorities can do their thing. The perfect trap! An effective way of getting rid of this upstart rabbi.

Jesus is aware of their malice, their deceitful testing. "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." The only coin that would work would be a Roman coin. Yet to procure and even hold a Roman coin, a Jewish person was violating the first two of the Ten Commandments. The coin would have an image of the Emperor, along with an inscribed confession declaring Caesar's divinity. This would directly violate the commands that, 1) You shall have no other gods before Me. 2) You shall not make any graven images. Just to hold the coin, these leaders were incriminating themselves and revealing how their power and greed corrupted them in their delusions. The people of the establishment were more interested in the security of the status quo than any new experience of God.

Fast-forward 2,000 years. In preparing the bulletin this week, it was almost painful reading through sample Prayers of Confession. Most of them would have us groveling before God as those not worthy of God's glory, that Reformed Tradition obsession with our sinfulness, as if we're wretched creatures deserving God's condemnation. But this totally misses the point. As if we need to be made worthy! The joy of faith is that we are worthy! What an honor the Incarnation has bestowed on us as we live in God's image.

David Lose invites us to, "Pause for a moment to let that sink in." This Lutheran Pastor and Seminary President says, "We were made in the image and likeness of God, and because we bear God's likeness we are to act like God. Not mind you, like *gods*, those who lord their authority over others for self-gain, but rather like *God* – the One who creates and sustains and nurtures and redeems and saves...no matter what the cost. We are called, that is, to serve as God's agents, God's partners, and God's co-workers, exercising dominion over creation not as an act of power

but rather as an act of stewardship and extending to all the abundant life God wishes for all.” This is a confession! We confess our faith in God!

Jesus shows us what this looks like, how to live as God in the world. David Lose gives us a few clues from this amazing text. Such as, “Notice that despite the fact that Jesus’ opponents carry a coin with a graven image and confession of Caesar’s divinity, Jesus accuses them of neither blasphemy nor disloyalty. Rather, he calls them *hypocrites*, those who have quite literally taken to wearing another, and false, likeness.” In other words, the word, *hypocrite* can also be translated as *actor*. An actor takes on a role, they put on another face other than their real one. Jesus is pointing out to these leaders that they have a strong case of “*amnesia*, for they have forgotten who they are, in whose likeness they were made.”

Friends, let us remember that our primary identity, our created self, the connected life we live is as God’s “children, and stewards, as those made in the likeness of God and charged to act like the God we see in Jesus.”

<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/10/pentecost-20-image-likeness-and-identity/> “...in the Meantime” weekly blog).

How can we live into this image and what does the church look like in sharing that image with the world? The Presbyterian Mission Agency recently invited a group of church leaders to Louisville Kentucky and the Presbyterian Center for a symposium on Christian Formation.

Trying to move beyond the limiting framework of church programs and Sunday school, which simply reinforce separation by age group, Christian formation brings generations together for shared worship and common practices that help us learn from each other. There are five components that are mentioned as key, formative Christian practices. Living into the image of God as people of the church involves many things, but these five summarize what most effectively bear witness to God’s transforming love. They include “hospitality, prayer, Sabbath, service, and storytelling.”

[https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/christian-formation-leaders-identify-life-long-christian-practices-faith/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=This%20Weeks%20PCUSA%20News%20-Oct-11-17%202017&utm\\_content=This%20Weeks%20PCUSA%20News%20-Oct-11-17%202017+CID\\_3c5455d59deebdf369ec0a84674ccbe2&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=Christian%20formation%20leaders%20identify%20lifelong%20Christian%20practices%20of%20faith](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/christian-formation-leaders-identify-life-long-christian-practices-faith/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=This%20Weeks%20PCUSA%20News%20-Oct-11-17%202017&utm_content=This%20Weeks%20PCUSA%20News%20-Oct-11-17%202017+CID_3c5455d59deebdf369ec0a84674ccbe2&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Christian%20formation%20leaders%20identify%20lifelong%20Christian%20practices%20of%20faith)

“Hospitality, prayer, Sabbath, service, and storytelling.” We are created in the image of God, we bear God’s image. These practices help give shape to spiritual truth, that we’re called to live as God in the Jesus Way. As we continue to journey as a people, as we are formed as Christians, and as faith becomes less of an object or possession that we have, and more of an action that we do, may we have eyes to see and ears to hear the glory of God shining through our hearts. And may God be glorified, now and forever. Amen.