

“Stamped with God’s Image”

Ephesians 4:1-16

When my mom was in Southwest Hospital, I noticed her nurse had an eastern European accent. When I asked her which country she immigrated from, she said she came to America from Romania when she was 23 years old. Because it was Sunday afternoon and I was wearing a black clergy shirt, she asked if I was a priest.

When I told her, I was a Lutheran pastor, she smiled and told me she married a Lutheran who hasn’t been back to church since. So, she raised her two children in a Romanian Orthodox Church.

She spoke of her respect for priests and pastors and wondered if she offered to come along, she could talk her husband into visiting Divinity. I let her know she would be welcomed.

Am I somebody important?

It’s easy to feel anything but important when the corporation sees you as a number, the boyfriend treats you like cattle, your ex takes your energy, or old age takes your dignity.

Somebody important? Hardly.

When you struggle with that question, remember the promise of God: you were created by God, in God’s image, for God’s glory. God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature. So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle. And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth” (Gen. 1:26 The Message).

Embedded in these words is the most wonderful of promises: God made us to reflect the image of God.

God created us to be more like him than anything else he made. He never declared, "Let us make oceans in our image" or "birds in our likeness." The heavens above reflect the glory of God, but they are not made in the image of God. Yet we are.

To be clear: no one is a god except in his or her own delusion. But everyone carries some of the communicable attributes of God. Wisdom. Love. Grace. Kindness. A longing for eternity. These are just some of the attributes that set us apart from the farm animal and suggest that we bear the fingerprints of the Divine Maker. We are made *in his image* and *in his likeness*.

"When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth" (Gen. 5:3). Seth bore the image and likeness of his father. Maybe he had his father's curly hair or dark eyes. Apart from having a belly button, Seth was like Adam in many ways.

The same is true of us. We "take after" God in many ways. There is no exception to this promise. Every man and woman, born or preborn, rich, or poor, urban, or rural, is made in the image of God. Some suppress it. Others enhance it. But all were made in the image of God.

Sin has distorted this image, but it has not destroyed it. Our moral purity has been tainted. Our intellect is polluted by foolish ideas. We have fallen prey to the elixir of self-promotion rather than God promotion. The image of God is sometimes difficult to discern. But do not think for a moment that God has rescinded his promise or altered his plan. He still creates people in his image to bear his likeness and reflect his glory.

The New Testament describes a progressive work of God to shape us into his image. As we fellowship with God, read his Word, obey his commands, and seek to understand and reflect his character, something wonderful emerges. Or, better stated, *Someone* wonderful emerges.

God comes out of us. We say things God would say. We do things God would do. We forgive, we share, and we love. It is as if God is scrubbing the smudge off an old coin. In time an image begins to appear.

God's goal is simply this: to rub away anything that is not of him so the inborn image of God can be seen in us.

This was God's explanation through the apostle Paul.

You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:9-10)

We . . . are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18).

And from today's text in Ephesians 4:15-16 . . . ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Pop psychology is wrong when it tells you to look inside yourself and find your value. The magazines are wrong when they suggest you are only as good as you are thin, muscular, pimple-free, or perfumed. The movies mislead you when they imply that your value increases as your stamina, intelligence, or net worth grows. Religious leaders lie when they urge you to grade your significance according to your church attendance, self-discipline, or spirituality.

According to the Bible you are good simply because God made you in his image. Period. He cherishes you because you bear a resemblance to him. And you will only be satisfied when you engage in your role as an image bearer of God.

Such was the view of King David: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps. 17:15 NKJV).

Lay hold of this promise and spare yourself a world of confusion and fear. How much sadness would evaporate if every person simply chose to believe this: *I was made for God's glory and am being made into his image.*

I love my grandsons, Colton, and Cason. I love when they read a book to me. I love watching them play soccer or hit one over the fence in our backyard. I love wrestling with them until Cason punches my pacemaker/defibrillator. I love being called "Papa". I love our grandsons.

I would do anything for them.

Why? Why do I love them so? Because they carry some of me. A small part for sure but a part of me, nonetheless.

Why does God love you with an everlasting love? It has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with whose you are. You are his. You carry a part of him. There is something of him in you. He made you in his image. He stamped his name on your heart. He breathed life into your lungs.

Someone called you a lost cause. Someone branded you as a failure. Someone dismissed you as insignificant. Don't listen to them, they don't know what they are talking about. A divine spark indwells you. When you say yes to God, he blows on that holy ember, and it begins to flame. It grows day by day within you. Are you perfect? No. But you are being made perfect. He bought you and owns you and has a wild and inexplicable love for you. His love for you does not depend on you.

You are God's idea. God's child. Created in God's image.

Would you let this truth find its way into your heart? You were conceived by God before you were conceived by your parents. You were loved in heaven before you were known on earth. You aren't an accident. You aren't a random fluke of genetics or evolution. You aren't defined by the number of pounds you weigh, followers you have, car you drive, or clothes you wear.

CEO or unemployed—doesn't matter. Hot list or not list—doesn't matter.

Blue-blooded or orphaned—doesn't matter.

High IQ or low standing—doesn't matter.

First string or cut from the squad—doesn't matter.

You are being made into God's image. Print that on your résumé. You are a diamond, a rose, and a jewel, purchased by the blood of Christ. In the eyes of God, you are worth dying for.
Would you let this truth define the way you see yourself?

Would you let this truth define the way you see other people? Every person you see was created by God to bear his image and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This means *all* people deserve to be seen for who they are: image bearers of God.

Imagine the impact this promise would have on the society that embraced it. What civility it would engender! What kindness it would foster! Racism will not flourish when people believe their neighbors bear God's image. The fire of feuds will have no fuel when people believe their adversaries are God's idea. Will a man abuse a woman? Not if he believes she bears the stamp of God. Will a boss neglect an employee? Not if she believes the employee bears a divine spark.

Will society write off the indigent, the mentally ill, the inmate on death row, or the refugee? Not if we believe, truly believe, that every human being is God's idea. And he has no bad ideas. Homeless men are created in the image of God. When the Mayor of Independence called Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries a “questionable organization” in his weekly letter to residents, he revealed his total ignorance about LMM. Despite his paranoia, the residents of Independence and neighboring businesses who stepped forward to express support and solidarity, dropping off donations, inquiring about volunteering, and expressing appreciation to LMM. We thank the residents of Independence who showed decency and compassion.

You and I were made by God to know him and make him known. Children have a tendency to say, "Look at me!" On the tricycle: "Look at me go!" On the trampoline: "Look at me bounce!" On the swing set: "Look at me swing!" Such behavior is acceptable for children. Yet many adults spend their grown-up years saying the same. “Look at me drive this fancy car!” “Look at me make money!” Look at me wear provocative clothes, use big words, or flex my muscles. Look at me!”

Isn't it time we grew up? We were made to live a life that says, “Look at God!” People are to look at us and see not us but the image of our Maker.

People are to look at our children and see the image of our Maker. Rachel McDonnell has taught Sunday School classes, Confirmation classes, First Communion classes, and today we install her as our half-time Youth Director while Tricia continues as our half-time Music Director. Rachel, Tricia, and Lori – all daughters of Divinity, all created in God's image, join Paula and myself in serving everyone here.

Ephesians 4:1-5 . . . ¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

This is God's plan. This is God's promise. And he will fulfill it! He will make us into his image.

May the peace of God . . .

#656 – Blest Be the Tie That Binds