

The Rev. Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
20th Sunday after Pentecost/Year A/Proper 24
October 22, 2017
Text: Matthew 22:15-22

“Till he shaped it in his own image...”

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at his sun,
And he looked at his moon,
And he looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down--
On the side of a hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till he thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

James Weldon Johnson

“Till he shaped it in his own image...”

Repeat that line with me.

“Till he shaped it in his own image...”

Repeat it again with me. “Till he shaped it in his own image...”

Turn and look and look into someone’s eyes and say it again. “Till he shaped it in his own image...”

The words you heard and repeated with me are taken from the “The Creation” a poem by James Weldon Johnson. Johnson’s poem is, of course, based on the Creation Story.

I thought these words were appropriate based on today’s Gospel and in these days that we and the world sometime forget that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. For us Episcopalians, it is the first article of faith that we are taught at the beginning of our Christian walk. We find it in our Book of Common Prayer in the *Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism* (BCP p. 845). We find our basis for this because it is written in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis where God says “*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

You and I and billions of others bear the image of God. And we are loved by our God. Think about that just for a moment. If you have never been told this or you’ve forgotten this or somehow not feeling it or you’ve heard so much that you’ve become immune to it-hear it again-God loves

you. It doesn't matter what the world thinks of you-God loves you and you have been made in God's image.

Theologian, David Lose, wrote in his commentary this week, "that because we bear God's likeness we are to act like God. Not mind you like *gods* (with a little 'g'), 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."* And because we have been created in God's likeness, we are to mirror the actions of God as partners and co-workers, sustaining and nurturing all the attributes that God has shown humankind and all of creation since the moment of creation-life, creativity, love, and so much more.

Jesus became incarnate to remind us of this. He came on a mission to show us how to "act like God" modeling for us how we must be willing to serve, heal, teach, feed, accept, forgive, and love our neighbor no matter who they are or what color their skin or the language they speak. For in serving, healing, teaching, feeding, accepting, forgive, and loving-we are loving him.

We all bear the image of God. And we are loved.

The air is tense in today's Gospel as we once again find Jesus in the temple with religious leaders. This time the Pharisees are teamed with the Herodians, supporters of the Roman regime, and they are bent on setting a trap for Jesus. They are still trying to figure out by whose authority he did what he does. "*Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?*" they asked. A trick question. If Jesus answered 'Yes', he would appear to be on the side of Rome and he would lose the support of the crowds. If he answered 'No', he could be accused of political insubordination. He asks for a coin. "*Whose head is this, and whose title?*" They say "*the emperor's.*" And Jesus replied, "*Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.*"

Just what are the things of God? We are. We bear the image of God. And we are God's own beloved. This is what we are to remember and to hold on to with every fiber of our being. And we are to be like *God*-mirroring the creative nature of God, mirroring the nurturing and sustaining power of God, mirroring the graciousness and love of our God who first loved us. The question is, are we living into the image of our Creator? Or

are we conforming to the ways of false emperors and in ways that are not of God?

Unless we've been hiding under a rock we know that the world is stress filled. Every week there is something new under the sun and it isn't always shiny and clean or odor free! Nature seems to be rebelling with ice melts, floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Around the globe, supposed leaders, groups, and individuals are taking out their rage or disgust- even threatening innocent and unsuspecting lives in public places, in workplaces, schools, music events, in towns like in the country of Somalia, and throughout systems that were designed to help people. Californians are still reeling from a wildfire of epic proportions that killed and displaced countless people. And Puerto Ricans too, from an unrelenting hurricane. Throughout the nation and including this city, racial tensions continue to mount leaving too many people left to feel that their lives don't matter. An opioid crisis stares us down and children are left without parents. The hungry are still hungry. And on and on and on. It's no wonder that more people don't watch the news anymore. And then we get to church and we are reminded of all the ills of the world. And on top of all of this, it is stewardship time and we are asked to give of ourselves at every level. And more will be asked of us as the biggest season of giving is right around the corner.

But as the former dean of Christ Church Cathedral, the very Rev. Mike Kinman, always said, it is here that together we gather at the foot of the cross. It is here that together we gather at God's Table. It is here that we hear God's words to us reminding us of who we are and whose we are. God's words as creatively re-written in "The Creation" poem. Hear them once more.

This great God...
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.

We bear the image of God. And we are loved. All that we are, all that we hope to be, all that we have comes from our God. Nothing truly belongs to the little emperors of the world-not one hair.

We bear the image of God. And we are loved. Amen. **

**"Pentecost 20: Image, Likeness, and Identity," a commentary by David J. Lose, 2017

This sermon was greatly inspired by Dean Kinman's Oct. 19, 2014 sermon, "We bear the image of God. We are beloved by God. We are God's own."