

2010 Praise Offering Service Adult Meditation

Texts

Genesis 1:26-29

Psalm 8

Galatians 3:26-29

John 1:1-16

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart be acceptable in your sight, O God. Amen.

“In the beginning God created...” *(pause)*

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” *(pause)*

“In the beginning.” *(pause)* I don’t know about you, but I don’t recall my beginning. I’ve only been told stories of it by members of my family. Most of us share similar accounts: hearing a baby is on its way; months of preparation, and finally a dash to the hospital or someone arriving at home just in time for our birthing.

Many of us have experienced birth most profoundly in our own children’s beginnings. If you are a mother who gave birth, you watched in awe as your child was being created within you, forever changing your own body as your unborn child was fed and nurtured in your womb. The small flickering of life stirring inside you that eventually strengthened into kicks that could take your breath away.

And by sharing your experiences with those around you, you shared with them the wonder of creation.

While not all of us have been blessed by the experience of giving birth, most of us have been witness to the miracle of becoming flesh as we held a newborn infant or joined in welcoming a new sister or brother into the body of Christ through baptism. Our own flesh, ever changing, is a constant reminder of God’s gift of life in this flesh.

But we are not only flesh, blood and bone. Genesis tells us we have been created in the image of God and are blessed by God. Think about that for a moment. *(pause)*

When you were preparing to come to church today, you probably looked in the mirror at some point: tidied your hair *(short pause)*, straightened your tie *(short pause)*, wiped the crumbs from your chin.

Did it occur to you, as you got dressed, ate breakfast and brushed your teeth this morning, that the body you are caring for was created in the image of God? *(short pause)* Now that should give us pause! *(pause)*

For those of us who struggle with self-image; who have been told we are ugly, worthless or stupid—God says that, despite what anyone tells us, we are made in God’s image and we are blessed.

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To those of us who have suffered abuse or neglect—we are made in God’s image and we are blessed.

To those of us who are unemployed or underemployed, who struggle with poverty—we are made in God’s image and we are blessed.

To those of us whose health is failing, or whose body is aging—we are made in God’s image and we are blessed.

When faced with the real and profound struggles of life, it may be hard to trust this blessing, but it remains there for us, just waiting for us to accept it.

As Lutherans, we too ask what it means to be created in the image of God. In our second strategic direction: “Diverse Faces,” the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada names our uniqueness as individuals created in God’s image. In this direction we are called to reach out into our communities, extending an invitation to our neighbours to participate in life in the gospel and life in the Church. This invitation is to be extended not just to those who look like us, but to *all*. It’s about being a church in which *all* people can share their gifts for God’s mission in the world.

And there’s more! In Galatians 3, verse 27, we are told we who “were baptized into Christ, have clothed [ourselves] with Christ.” This means that we not only bear the image of God, but we wear Christ. (*short pause*) Now that’s a pretty fine outfit if I ever saw one!

But what does it mean to clothe ourselves with Christ? (*pause*) Well, first of all, we must know Christ. In modeling the life of Christ through the study of scripture, prayer, worship and sharing the sacraments, we become one in Christ and heirs to the kingdom of God. In this way, putting on Christ enables us to be “Spiritual Disciples” in our church and in the world.

Created, blessed, clothed and made heirs—even “crowned with glory,” we read in Psalm 8, with “everything placed under our feet.” Is it any wonder that we have become so good at accepting glory and dominion over creation as part of our due?

The words in the second chapter of Genesis offer a different perspective:

“In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—**for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground**; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—**then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground**, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living

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being. **And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden**, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... **The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.**"

(Genesis 2:4b-9, 15)

This more ancient creation narrative challenges the common assumption that the garden was created for humanity. Here we see that Eden was not a utopia awaiting our good pleasure. In fact, God created the Adam *before* the garden, to be a co-creator of it and to tend to it. In other words, created in God's image, we have been created to serve God's good creation. That is our purpose.

How then do we live out that purpose? How do we honour the image of God we bear and the clothes of Christ we wear?

Luther's *Small Catechism* provides an example for our daily beginnings:

"In the beginning" of each day we are encouraged to make the sign of the cross, thus putting on Christ;

"In the beginning" and throughout each day, we are to offer to God our prayers of thanks, praise and petition;

"In the beginning" of each day, we can joyfully regard the image of God reflected in our mirror, and go forth blessed and strengthened to be *In Mission for Others*.

(pause)

And that's just the beginning...

Let us pray: May each of us, uniquely and wonderfully made, be strengthened for the service to which we have been called this day. In the name of the One in whom we are clothed, we pray. Amen.