

Sermon 24.07.07

Kate Heinzl, pastor

[SLIDES](#) begin at “sermon”

Genesis 1: 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. *And God saw that the light was good*; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1, 8, 11

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace...God has made everything beautiful in its time. God has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Psalm 27:5-6

"One thing I ask from The LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in God's temple."

Psalm 19:1

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Read as part of the call to worship:

The first time we meet God in the story of Scripture, we meet him as an Artist. “Created” is the first verb in the first sentence on the Bible’s first page. Out of the flurry of God’s imagination, the heavens and the earth burst into existence and teem with diversity and beauty. God could have easily spoken a monochrome cosmos into being. He could have made an all-gray universe—gray planets, gray animals, gray-on-gray rainbows in a gray sky. Even oranges would be called “grays.” This Graytopia could’ve been perfectly efficient and functional from an engineering perspective. Why, then, make our multi-hued universe? Why the color spectrum? Why red strawberries, orange oranges, and yellow lemons? Why mandarinfish, peacocks, and chameleons? Because, as [Genesis 1](#) repeats seven times, “God saw that it was good.” Evidently, God cares about more than efficiency and functionality. He also cares about beauty.¹

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/theology-art-2-minutes/>

Sermon:

Carl Keener article - title: "Female birds sing too, science is better when it's inclusive"² (IMAGE) it starts out: Despite the well over 1,000 scientific publications about barn swallows, female barn swallow song had never previously been the focus of a research article... and goes on to explore why female bird song has rarely been studied - there are several reasons: conventional evolutionary theory that has males vying for female attention; another is that researchers tend to study what's close by, and female birds that migrate long distances have adapted to sing less; and the third reason is that up until recently, the research has been dominated by men. Women are much more likely than men to be first authors on papers on female birdsong. The author of this article (a woman) concludes: ***The historical lack of diverse participation in science may have contributed to researchers forming self-reinforcing assumptions that impeded a full understanding of the world around us.***

Who does the investigating, the creating, the writing? When it's a certain population, the diversity of exploration tends to be diminished. And we tend to create theories, ideas and images that look like us. (image of W Sallaman "Jesus")

I want to explore today what our images of God are (many are actually of Jesus the Christ - God's too big, mysterious to capture)- who's created them, do they fit our understanding, and what happens when we become more inclusive in our visions of who Jesus the Christ might be - bringing more understandings of the God/Christ figure?

This picture - one that has been reproduced more than 500 million times, dates back to the mid-1930s, when students at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago voted a black and white sketch titled "Son of Man," by this illustrator Warner Sallman, as the most accurate portrayal of Jesus. A publisher of religious material in Indianapolis bought the rights to the image and, in 1940, with the copyright to Sallman's color painting, "Head of Christ", an industry was born. Wallet-sized versions were distributed to soldiers and sailors during World War II- I wonder how many of us saw this picture in homes or churches growing up.

How does that picture influence our understanding of Jesus? He looks like he could be related to me. Makes me feel like I belong. And there's something that I've come to see as not quite right. Comforting, maybe. But Jesus likely didn't look a whole lot like me - or like Sallman's depiction.

Ben sent me a picture of a sticker on Meredith's phone - (IMAGE) At first I thought that was wrong, that's not what this picture was originally named. But it's how it's recently been re-named, and it re-shapes one way we may understand God. I learned that

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<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/female-birds-sing-too/>

the early images of God were often made to look like the gods of Greek myths - The artists were referring to other gods the people of that era would know.

So Zeus is changed to represent God (IMAGE) - THE God - creator of the universe. The one who brought all things into being and said that it was good. This is how God was imagined by the Italian painter, Cima de Conegliano around the year 1500.

(IMAGE) This picture, re-interpreted as God, is from a 1940, contemporary understanding of the goddess Venus, interpreted as God by a woman here at Penn State.

Notice your reactions - what art work brings comfort, which pieces might make you squirm a little, or dismiss them? We tend to like what we know, what's familiar, what's like us.

For most of us, we've had to do some mental undoing - we saw images, like the white bearded God in the heavens, and that was that. No questions asked. We saw this masterpiece, (IMAGE) from the Italian artist Michaelangelo painted on the ceiling of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel in the early 1500s...The fresco illustrates God giving life to Adam as part of the two biblical creation stories. It references the verse Genesis 1:27 "God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female, they were created"

likely, we didn't see this image, (IMAGE) re-shaped, by the Afro-Cuban artist Harmonia Rosales.

What happens when we see ourselves, or don't see ourselves, in these images of the Divine? Do we, like the scientists studying bird song, miss the vast complexity and beauty that surrounds us? We heard those beautiful words from the psalms:

Psalm 27:5-6

"One thing I ask from The LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in God's temple."

Psalm 19:1

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

We come seeking God, desiring to gaze on the beauty of the heavens - all of which proclaims God's handiwork. (IMAGE) All of it; all of us - show glimpses of this amazing universe we call home.

By the middle of the 20th century, the global center of Christianity had begun shifting away from Europe to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Christianity around the world was becoming less white, and pictures of Jesus hanging in churches from Jordan to Japan to Jamaica were looking more like the people in those places, instead of the standard white portraits from Europe or North America, - Local artists were doing their own version of Christianity.

And so, I want to gaze together at some images - old and new, to broaden our vision of Jesus, God incarnate.

IMAGE - Pantocrator. The Greek word *Pantocrator* literally means “he who has authority over everything.” In order to represent such mighty qualities, Byzantine iconographers made use of features, such as an open right hand, that could convey a sense of power and authority. This image on the left is the oldest known example of “Christ Pantocrator” in the world. The different expressions shown on the right and left sides of Jesus’ face may suggest his double nature as both human and divine.

Just notice what it is to see these different images of ‘he who has authority over everything’.

Here’s one of the earliest artist depictions we have of Jesus: (IMAGE) The Good Shepherd, dated 3rd C - painted on the walls of the St. Callisto catacomb in Rome, shows Jesus as he is carrying a calf on his shoulder.

Let’s take a look at images from those around the world.

What did Jesus look like?

Giovanni Battista Cima around 1500

Jim Caviezel in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004)

Here is Stanley Rayfield, an African-American’s understanding of Jesus,

Emmanuel Garibay, “Third Day” (2013),

Emmanuel Garibay is a painter from the Philippines who often expresses the struggles of the common man from his context.

Solomon Raj, “Jesus on the Lotus Flower” (1998).

(IMAGE) In Indian art Jesus is often seen as peaceful, not suffering. Here, Dr. Solomon Raj, artist and theologian, shows Jesus as teacher, sitting on a lotus flower much like the Buddha, the lotus being a symbol of purity.

Greg Weatherby, “Crucifixion” (2006), Greg Weatherby, an Australian of Aboriginal descent, absorbs Jesus into Aboriginal storytelling, depicting Jesus and his followers as Mimi, spirit beings with elongated bodies who taught the Aboriginal peoples practical life skills and gave them culture. In this image, Jesus is crucified in front of Ayers Rock, a place of mystery and magic for Aboriginal peoples. By absorbing Jesus’s death into Aboriginal myth, Weatherby suggests that Jesus’ story, too, has sacred significance and is for his people.

The Chinese-born artist James He Qi’s “Peace, Be Still” (1998) depicts Christ stilling the waters in bold colors that recall stained-glass windows. He blends Chinese folk customs and modern western art.

Sofia Minson, “Maori Jesus” (2014). This artist shows Jesus as a Maori man with full-face moko (traditional tattoo) and a huia bird, once native to New Zealand but now extinct, as a neck ornament.

Kelly Latimore, a St. Louis artist portrays the The Holy Family. Kelly's work is contemporary and often provocative. His images ask us - how can we shape a culture of Christianity where love truly has no boundaries? How do we create a world where our poor, homeless, refugee, Palestinian Savior - born to a teenage mother and later condemned to death - how do we create a world where he would be cherished had he been born today?

There are many images of bible stories - I want to look at a few from the last supper. What's familiar, which ones challenge you?

The last supper - da Vinci,

Sara Jenkins - is a queer artist from northern Appalachia.

Ethiopian - The inked strip of parchment from Ethiopia features a black Jesus at the Last Supper, an image ubiquitous in the country. Modest paintings not much bigger than a letter-sized sheet of paper — like this of the Last Supper — are found throughout Ethiopia.

How do you envision God? that's a question I put forth last week -

Micah S sent me: The Angelus by Jean Francois Millet, painted around 1858, Micah says: this painting calls to mind the great cloud of witnesses - all the ordinary people throughout history who have ordered their lives not only according to planting and harvesting - the seasons of nature, but also by daily rhythms of prayer and the circle of the church calendar.

Ben Wideman sent this one, writing: In high school I started listening to the Christian Nu Metal band, P.O.D. This album art for their breakthrough album, *The Fundamental Elements of Southtown*, stood out to me for a variety of reasons - I didn't realize Christian music could be so edgy, challenging, and controversial, and there were so many details to obsess over their possible meaning! It made a deep impression on me that it was possible to challenge systems and assumptions, while remaining rooted and grounded in a faith tradition.

Art can open us wide! Challenge us. Inspire us. Makes us think outside our comfortable understandings.

Art work can also remind us.

IMAGE - mulberry tree - “we live in a Christ Soaked World” - mulberries are something I see as a gift of incredible abundance (I love to stop on a trail and eat and eat, my fingers stained purple, my belly happy. And I see them as a pest tree that are nearly impossible to get rid of - their roots go deep and spread wide, making them difficult to pull out.

They challenge me: How do I choose to meet this little piece of creation?

Do I find God in the abundance that is provided - generously, freely?

Do I find God in the struggle of trying to yank out those things that don't serve me, or the land, well?

Art can open us wide! Challenge us. Inspire us. Makes us think outside our comfortable understandings.

Where do you experience God - the Creator, Jesus, the one who fed, who was peaceful and who suffered?

COMMUNION:

We confess, recognizing the many ways we fall short of love - and still, we come. We come not because we are strong and confident in our understandings, but sometimes simply because we're hungry - hungry for what the world cannot give.

So join me in this invitation to communion:

At the table of Christ,
we eat this bread and drink this cup
to remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus,
to be united with Christ and with one another as the church,
and to look toward a time when all will be one.

As we eat and drink with thanksgiving, Jesus Christ is present with us
and we are empowered by the Spirit to follow Jesus' way of love as the body of Christ,
broken and blessed for the life of the world.

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Bless bread and cup.

All are invited to this table - the table is open to all -
if your walk with Jesus is strong; you are welcome
if you're not sure where you belong... if you're hungry and thirsty and seeking; you are welcome here.

INVITE SERVERS FORWARD

gluten free, take it back to your seats and we'll partake together.

Come, come, the table is set, Christ the host, welcomes you. Come.

END WITH Lord's Prayer