

22 May 2005
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Images of God, Then and Now”

Text: Genesis 1:27

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“*We’re all made in the image of God.*” You’ve heard that phrase. I hear it a lot. It’s bandied about in a lot in our world today, usually by persons who are demanding equal rights, who want approval and support for their views and actions. It’s used as a kind of a “religious trump card.” They hope by using that phrase to establish a certain validity for their position, to demonstrate that we are all equal, that we are all the same. No matter who we are, no matter what we choose to do.

But the truth is that in our world today we are not all equal. Not all life is considered the same. The United States Constitution used to value slaves as only 3/5 of a person. Today, children still in their mother’s wombs are not even counted *that* valuable by many. And who is considered higher? A white collar or a blue collar worker? A renter or a homeowner? Even in our personal lives we must decide – is a person worth our time? Our effort? Our energy? Our money? The Jehovah’s Witness at the door. The mailing from a charity asking for a donation. Your neighbor who needs help? And we determine that some are, and some are not.

One recent example of this caused no small dispute and contention. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, you’ll remember that a victim’s compensation fund was formed and donations were collected to compensate the victim’s families for the loss of their loved ones. Maybe you even donated to that. *But each family did not receive the same amount.* A determination had to be made as to what each life was worth. And many questions had to be answered. Was a father worth more than a single man? Was an executive worth more than a blue collar worker? What about the potential for future earnings? And what about the rescue workers? Since they risked their lives to save others, were they worth more than those who just happened to be in the Towers that day? As a result of these factors, some families received up to ten times more than others. And this task, for determining what each family received and *what each life was worth*, fell to one man. And after he had completed his task, he said he would never do it again.

So what does it mean? What does it mean to be made ***“in the image of God?”*** Today we need to cut through all the rhetoric and propaganda and sloganeering, and determine what God has told us in His Word. And today, we heard the truth. That in the beginning, when God created all things, man *was* made ***in the image of God.*** Man received what nothing else in all of creation received. Everything was made ***“good”*** and all of creation was ***“very good”*** (v 31), but of no other creature in heaven or on earth can it be said that they were made ***“in the image of God.”*** Not even the angels. This honor was given only to man. And made in the image of God means not that we looked like God, but that we were created in perfection and righteousness, with a right knowledge of God, and true fear and confidence and trust in God. The crown of his creation. Given dominion over all the earth.

But on the day that Adam and Eve sinned, **this image of God was lost.** No longer do we fear and love God as we ought. No longer do we have any natural knowledge of God as our loving Father. No longer do we have confidence in him and do His will, but we take matters into our own hands and do our will. We are broken. Sin has broken creation. It has broken us. We’re different, and we now consider others differently. Just consider Adam and Eve. From the moment they sinned, they were different. Sinful, ashamed, corrupt, and naked. They lost the glory of God that covered them, the image of God.

But not wanting to be seen “naked” (Adam, Genesis 3:10), or as they were without the image of God, Adam and Eve tried to hide – from each other, behind fig leaves; and from God. And we too. We don’t want others to see us as we really are, and so we try to hide by creating *substitute images* for the image of God that we lost. Masks to hide behind, so that others will think a certain way about us. Maybe to even try to hide the truth from ourselves. And we all have them. Perhaps you have created a religious image or mask, to hide your sin, so that people will think you are holier than you really are. Perhaps you have an image or mask of bravery to hide your fear. The cry ***“we’re all made in the image of God”*** is a **mask** so that you cannot condemn me for who I am, or what I am doing! And on and on we go. But when all is said and done, behind the masks we are still broken. We are still sinful and corrupt. All equally 100% sinful and corrupt! And while we *may* be able to hide who we are from each other, and even from ourselves – but we cannot hide this from God. We are poor creators, and whatever substitute images we create for ourselves are poor images indeed.

But the God who created man in His image does not leave us this way – fallen and broken. For the God who creates also re-creates, and *He* (not us!) is restoring His image in this fallen and broken world. We can try to create (or assert!) images for ourselves, but only God can create something out of nothing – ***in the beginning***, and still today. And so after sin entered the world, after the image of God in us was lost, **God** acted. The Father

sent His Son into the world. The Son, who is the true and exact image of God the Father. And the Son of God incarnate shows us true man, without sin. In Jesus, the image that we lost, lives. *Jesus* is the perfect man, unbroken by sin. *Jesus* is the One who knows His Father and His Father's will, and does it. *Jesus* is the one who has complete trust and confidence in His Father. Jesus is the righteous one.

Yet Jesus did not live in this world as the image of God so that the image of God would again be in the world for a short time – He came to restore it for *all* time. And so He came not to give us an example to imitate, but to give again what we had lost. To restore the image in us that we lost in sin. And so to do that, He who was perfect took and put upon Himself our sin, our punishment and death, and our broken image; and in return gives us (as we heard last week) His Spirit. **And through the Holy Spirit, the image of God is again given to us.** The Spirit present and active at creation is now the Spirit present and active in us, re-creating us, making us new, and conforming us to the image of Christ, who is the image of the Father. And here we see the whole work of God, the Holy Trinity, for us. The Father, who sent His Son, who sends the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit who joins us to the Son, who takes us to the Father. To give us what we lost. To re-create what we destroy in sin. To forgive us, and restore to us the image and position we had been given in the beginning.

And that work is what this day is all about. For we celebrate Holy Trinity Sunday not simply to proclaim *who* our God is – the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity. Although we certainly do that. Today we also proclaim what He has done and is doing **for us**. To proclaim that the Holy Trinity is *applying Himself to the world* for the life of the world. For your life and mine. To restore His image in us. To give us what we cannot create. For if He didn't give it, we wouldn't have it.

And with that understanding we can also perhaps look at the words we heard in the Holy Gospel in a new light. Those words, known commonly as the "Great Commission" are not so much about what we are to do as they are about what God the Holy Trinity is doing. What the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are doing through His church, applying Himself to the world. Making disciples, baptizing, teaching, feeding, raising, forgiving, through the means that He has given. His water, His body and blood, His words. Through these means restoring, re-creating, giving, making something out of nothing. The voices and hands and feet may be ours, but the work is our triune God's. Creating again children in His image, conforming us to the image of His Son.

For the terrorist attack in the Garden of Eden caused devastation to our world, and like it or not, it has affected each and every one of us. Yes, we were all made in the image of God, but that image of God was lost. And the task of recovering what was lost that day

fell to **one man**, and He determined that each life was worth **His own**. And so He gave His life for your life. He suffered the shame and nakedness and death of the cross and then rose from the dust of death to life, that all who believe in Him might be raised from the dust of death with Him, and live not only forever, but already now, again in the image of God. And after He had completed His task, *He said it need never be done again*. It is finished. You are whole. You are healed. You are forgiven and re-created.

And so we sang in the Introit today: *“Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him for he has shown his mercy to us.”* Indeed that is what this day is all about. The Holy Trinity in mercy giving Himself to us, and we in turn giving glory to Him. But giving glory to Him not simply here in church, but daily in our lives, by living the image we have been given again. Living as Christ in the world. Giving to the least. Determining that each life is worth our own. But not because *they* are or claim to be in the image of God – but because now, in Christ, we are!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.