

“Spirit of God”

November 24, 2019 Brother Mark Jenkins, C.F.C.

Sermon on the last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King Sunday

Do you know what is one of the most amazing statements made in Scripture? We're made in the image of God. That's a pretty incredible thing to say and it's key for our relationships. To understand relationships you first have to understand yourself. So today we're going to answer the questions, “Who are we?” and “What does it mean to be made in God's image?”

First, we are intentionally made. God is the giver of all life and He never makes mistakes! You weren't a mistake or an accident either! You are the intentional creation of God. In the first five days of creation, God's approach to creation seems to be a bit permissive. The phrase we see repeated over and over again in Genesis 1 is, "Let there be..." When God creates light he says, "Let there be light." When God creates plants he says, "Let there be...." When God creates animals he says, "Let there be...." However, when God creates human beings, there is much greater intentionality. God says, "Let us make..." You weren't a mistake or an afterthought. You are the intentional creation of God. Understanding our true identity and experiencing our full potential begins with realizing that we are God's idea and God's intent. If so, then our identity, our worth, our value, our significance, and our purpose comes from God and God alone.

Second, our connection to God is life giving. Genesis 1 begins with: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The word used for “Spirit of God” in Hebrew is “ruach” which means wind. In chapter two, we have the image of God molding Adam from the dirt and then breathing into him the breath of life, “ruach” into Adam. Everyone take a big deep breath and exhale. That is the sound of breathing. It is the sound of new life. The psalmist's declares, “Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord.” Our connection to God is life giving as He gives us the breath of life. Think for a moment of the very first time a child takes its breath after being born. That's the breath of life and the breath of God giving them life. It is as real as the very breath in our lungs. And as we grow, our relationship to and connection with God is meant to be not only life giving but life sustaining. Somehow we have managed to reduce this connection to a 15 minute briefing session in the morning and maybe a shout out before we go to sleep at night. Our connection to God is essential, and should be as consistent as the very breath in our lungs because it gives us life.

Third, we are meant to be vulnerable and authentic. When God created Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, he placed them in the Garden of Eden. The author of Genesis sums up their description of paradise by saying the man and his wife were naked and felt no shame. In fact, he mentions Adam and Eve's nakedness five times in the opening chapters of Genesis. The author isn't just making an off-handed comment about Adam and Eve's inhibitions. He is describing something profound about the very nature and connection between Adam, Eve and God. When you're naked you can't cover up who you are. There no masks, no facades and no clothes defining who you are, just complete and utter authenticity. Adam and Eve are so connected to God and each other that they can walk around naked and feel no shame, no insecurity and no anxiety. In other words, they were comfortable in their own skin. And this is what God not only desires for us but also desires for our relationships with Him and with others. We are meant to be vulnerable and authentic because God made himself vulnerable and authentic to us. The walks taken each afternoon with God in the Garden are meant to describe intimacy and being real with one another. But God also made us vulnerable because he has given us free will to choose him. Rather than being forced to worship God and love him, we are given the freedom to choose God or not. In doing so God made himself open to rejection and thus vulnerable to be hurt.

Fourth, we are sinners. Things look really good in Genesis 2 as Adam and Eve enjoy a great relationship with each other and a perfect relationship with God. But in chapter 3 things take a turn for the worse when Adam and Eve disobey God. They eat from the forbidden tree and then realize they're naked. Guilt and shame envelop them. So, they hide from God, the one who created them, who knew who they were, and who gave them their worth, identify and value. Too often we look to something outside of God to tell us who we are and how much we are worth, whether that be our job, our spouse, our clothes, the things we own, our home, our friends or our accomplishments. And when we do, our relationship to God is broken because we're looking for something else to be god in our lives. There just seems to be something inside us which draws us to search for all of these things apart from God.

The Bible has a term for this: idol worship. An idol is anything that we look to that tells us who we are and how much we are worth apart from God. Idol worship is alive and kicking. It's all around us as we aspire to be like the rich, the famous, the powerful, the beautiful, the uber talented. God says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 'You shall have no other gods before me.'" You know the dangerous thing about worshiping idols? We're giving ourselves to something that can't give us anything in return. Of idols, the psalmist says, "They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They

have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat." (Psalm 115:5-7) Even though we were created and wired to worship God, we end up worshiping things which cannot give us life, meaning and purpose. The Bible calls us fools, for Isaiah 45:20 states "Ignorant are those that carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save."

Instead, we are to give praise and glory to God. This idea of worshiping God is all over the place in the scriptures. Psalm 86:12 says, "I will praise you Lord my God with all my heart, I will glorify your name forever."

So how can I avoid idol worship and worship the one true God? First, I have to exhale, which is confession. I have to confess and acknowledge the fact that there is or has been things in my life on which I have been putting way too much emphasis. I have to acknowledge the fact that I have been an idol worshiper. I've traded my true identity for a powerless, generic knock-off. I have to breathe it out by confessing it. And when we do, we can ask for God's forgiveness. We have to get right with God and that starts first with confession.

Second, I have to inhale anew the Word and Spirit. Take a big, deep breath in and allow God's word and Spirit to bring us life in Him again. Every morning I have to allow God's word to speak into my life. Rick Warren says it, "When God speaks, things change." God spoke all of creation all into existence. God's word generates life. It creates faith, produces change, frightens the devil, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptations, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds, gives us our sense of worth and purpose and guarantees our future forever. We cannot live without the Word of God and we need a daily diet of it.

We also cannot live and worship by our own Spirit. We need to be intentional about seeking God's Spirit for our lives and to draw our life and power from Him. You have to yield to God's Spirit. Just because it's there, doesn't mean you automatically do what it says. You have to yield to what God says in your life and go wherever it leads and do what it says.

Third, commit to healthy and connected relationships. Relationships are tricky, especially when it comes to our significance. It's hard to keep from putting too much weight on our relationships and asking our relationships to make us who we are. We can't hold our relationships responsible for how we feel about ourselves, or for our own insecurities. Just because our relationships are a vital part of what makes us,

relationships shouldn't define us. When we actually learn to take the pressure off our relationships, it frees us up to enjoy them. Our relationships are, without a doubt, the most influential things in our lives.

Finally, remember you exist for a greater purpose than yourself. I am not the center of the universe. One of my most unrelenting idols is me. I was made in the image of God. I exist to reflect his image, and not the other way around. God has given us this incredible ability to create. We can do amazing things. Every single person in this room has something to offer. You have a gift. You have ability. You have something to contribute. God didn't give you all that so you could check out. God gave it to you so you could contribute. Do you know what the first command God ever gave to human beings was? "Be fruitful and multiply." This isn't just about having kids. It's about using the gifts and blessings God has given you to give God glory and to build the kingdom of God. When we don't engage our gifts and abilities then we are simultaneously shutting down what it means to be a human being and neglecting the fact that we are made in the image of God. How are you contributing? How are you serving the purposes of God?

Every now and then, we need to be reminded of whose we really are. We are not defined by other people's opinions of us, by the relationships in which we are, by our successes, failures, what we have or what we don't have. We are defined by God. It is in Him that we live, move and have our being. Everybody take a deep breath again. As you do, may you be free from the lure of idols. May you worship the one true God. May you truly be comfortable in your own skin. May you live into the potential of what it means to be made in the image of God. Amen