

## **Matthew 6:25-33**

It is so important to remember in the opening creation account in Genesis that God saw that what the Trinity created was *good* - mind you what an understatement - the variety, the diversity, the complexity, the beauty the perfection, as the Gospel reading points out - nothing compares to the beauty of creation ..... which simply relies upon God's provision. Have you noticed just how difficult it is to capture the beauty of a landscape? No matter how good the photographer or how talented the artist and no matter how spectacular their work turns out to be, I think even they would admit, that it cannot compete with actually witnessing the real thing.

And the finale of God's creative act on the sixth day: 'let us make human beings ..... in our image, to be like us'.

So, what does that mean exactly - that we're made in God's image? And if that's so, what is God like? What is the image we are supposed to reflect?

There seem to be so many different perceptions about God: different teachings. different attitudes. Perhaps this is because, rather than look at the evidence, we tend to make God into **our** image - we project on him our ideas of what or who God is, or should be.

There is one notion that he is a tyrannical figure just waiting for us to do something wrong and punish us. I know the 'God of the Old Testament', as he is sometimes referred to, can seem a bit like that - handing out terrible punishments for disobedience ..... but if we spend more than a cursory moment reading the Hebrew Scriptures - the Old Testament as we know it - which is the bible Jesus - and Paul would've had - and especially from a helpful translation like The Message - it soon becomes clear that this is a God who presented as a gift this wondrous creation to human beings, giving them rule over everything: a God who, time

and time again, forgives a 'stiff-necked', disobedient people who are always turning away from him to worship all sorts of things - idols. The story of Israel as a nation tells us Yahweh even allows them to have their own way and appoint a king - what an insult; Yahweh - the God of Israel was their King, they didn't need anybody else to lead them - and they still thought they did. So he sends prophet after prophet to try to persuade them to change their ways.

And really, we have no excuse for 'getting God wrong', because the New Testament tells us how he came and lived as one of us; rolled up his sleeves (as it were) and came himself to show us what he was like - and how we should live - to show us the image in which we have been made.

And yet God understands that we, no matter how hard we try, are utterly unable to conquer that pride within us, that ego that insists upon our right

to ourselves, our right to make decisions on our own.

Jesus wonderfully fulfilled all the requirements of the law - Matthew's gospel, particularly, emphasizes this - by taking all the wrongness of the world upon himself on the cross and through this self-emptying, *agape* love set the whole human race free from its bondage, - restoring our relationship with God to what it was always intended to be....If we'll have him!

We have been made in the image of this God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - who shares creation with us, who rescues us from the tyranny and bondage of sin, who lives in a relationship of love, of mutual indwelling without any loss of identity. Three Persons with their distinct roles, each wholly committed to one another. If we could only glimpse the life - the dance - the joy of God's life that we're being drawn into...

It stands to reason, therefore, that if we 'decide for God, living a life of 'God-worship' as Matthew's Gospel puts it, then *this* is the image we should reflect. This should be our blueprint - a community of love.

Now I know that the traditional rendition of the Gospel we have heard today may be too much to take on board, telling us as it does not to worry about what we eat and what we wear, because we know only too well that there are tens of thousands of refugees out there without food, without shelter, without the essentials of human existence including their identity - and surely that cannot mean that they have somehow failed to concentrate sufficiently on the Kingdom of God and that is why their needs are not being met.

But the version I'm going to read now I think might help give us gives us a clearer understanding of what Jesus meant:

If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

<sup>27-29</sup> “Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever been able to get taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen colour and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

<sup>30-33</sup> “If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about

missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

This passage is not meant just to reassure us but to challenge us. What Jesus is saying is that if we need to trust in God and allow his Spirit to live in us. Living life as a child of God is about living as a community, in relationship with each other, caring not so much about our own needs, our own feelings, about ourselves but about each other – in the same way that the three persons of the Trinity relate to and defer to one another. We are made in their image after all.

And while that care and concern for others begins within our own community we must remember that God so loved the **world**. How heartbroken God must be at the plight of so many people living in a world of abundance, yet suffering the most awful deprivation and forced displacement

It doesn't seem to matter how much money is given to charitable organisations who seek to

alleviate the suffering it still goes on and we hear dreadful stories of corruption where the money raised ends up paying for the extravagant lifestyles of a few or buying weapons to feed war and hatred. It can all be overwhelming and leave us feeling powerless. What can we do to help?

We can and should, of course pray - prayer isn't a last resort or an excuse for not doing something. Prayer is powerful, never feel that your individual prayer can't make a difference and who knows how many other people are praying the same prayer? I believe that turning to God in prayer, seeking his guidance, is what should happen before we *do* anything. I wish I could remember that though - never seem to learn!

In our intercessions we continue to pray for justice for those who depend on the earth for their daily food and fuel, for those who labour in poverty, and are oppressed by unjust laws,

We're encouraged to be Fairtrade churches - and their vision is of a world in which justice and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices so that everyone, through their work, can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full potential. It's all about decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world.

By ensuring that when we shop for our weekly groceries, we buy products bearing the FAIRTRADE mark we are effectively making a difference to a lot of lives because the Fairtrade system currently works farmers and workers - across more than 70 developing countries. And of course we're all aware of the overuse and dumping of plastic

What a reflection upon the human race though – that a corporation has to be set up to try to ensure this basic justice for so many of the world’s population.

Back to where we started: being human means being made to reflect the image of the creator back into the world. Creation was made to flourish when looked after by humans, not to be spoiled or destroyed because of greed and selfishness. Finding what we are made for and being obedient to that and nothing else, even if it is at times costly, is part of reflecting the image of God.

Because the Kingdom of God will be a place where there will be justice for all, no more greed, no more selfishness, no more cruelty or pain, no more tears. So let’s practice shall we? Let’s try to live as we were intended to live – in the image of God.

Because, in his letter to the Romans. Paul tells us that the whole of creation is longing to be set free for its original purpose...and is impatient for us to get the message out.