

Created in the Image of God



In Genesis 1:27 (NRSV), we read, “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” God created everything in our world, but only humans, both men and women equally, were created by God in God’s image enabling us to create, love one another and to care for the earth and all its plants and animals. If we believe this, what does it mean for us and how can it influence our lives?

To begin with, God created us out of love. When I create something, be it a written reflection, or a salad for a meal, (as above), I want it to be the best it can be to serve others whom I care about, but the leaflets and food are not created in my image. I am sure that God also wants us humans to be the best we can be, but in addition God’s creation of us is to make us in God’s image or likeness (Genesis 1:26).

But what is God’s image or likeness? We humans are not created to be pictorial likenesses of God, but to reveal in our words and actions God’s very being, which is love. It is a love which is freely given and received. It is not forced on anyone. God is ultimately in control of us and our world, but does not control our every word, deed and thought.

If *all* humans are created in the image of God, then everyone has the potential to reveal something of God’s love. On Facebook I have often watched someone unexpectedly stopping to help a disabled person to cross a road, or to feed a

hungry person unable to buy food. The video usually ends up with the one helped and the helper both, in a sense, being fulfilled by receiving and giving love to the other.

Further, if *all* men and women are created by God in the image of God, we must love, respect and reverence everyone as embodying God's presence, and desire their wellbeing. This means that we are to love all people regardless of gender, age, race or disability, and even those who harm us or others. However, loving them does not mean accepting domestic violence, hatred or war, but rather working towards the reconciliation of those involved. A respectful attitude is also to be shown in our relationships with animals, nature and the work we create in our office, workshop or kitchen.

God's love is an all embracing love, it is not egotistical, focused on loving itself. We worship a God who is a Trinity, a community of three persons, Father, Son, and then the Holy Spirit which is the love that flows between them. Being in the image of a Trinitarian God means that to reveal God's love there must be more than one person, and a man and a woman are needed to create a new human being. When we are in communion with God and other people, the love of God can be shared, incarnated and able to flourish.

As Christians we are followers of Jesus who imaged God's love in his life on earth through his words and actions. In the Gospels we read of Jesus showing love and care for people who were usually rejected such as the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, children ordered away by his disciples in Luke 18:16, and the criminal on the cross who asked to be remembered in Luke 23:43. We can also read in John 21:15-19 of the love of Jesus for Peter who denied him, but was forgiven and commissioned to help others.

To love as Jesus did and does can be somewhat puzzling, but in the Bible we have advice as to *how* we are to love. In Deuteronomy 6:5 we are commanded to love God, with all our heart, soul and might. Then in Leviticus 19:18 we are told to love our neighbours as ourselves.

To grow in our love for God takes time as we gradually learn more about God and pray to God each day. When it comes to loving others as ourselves, we may feel we are not always wanting to love ourselves. Perhaps we despise ourselves for doing things we wish we had not done, or we are frustrated and impatient

with the weaknesses of our bodies and minds. When we realise that our bodies and life are God's gift to us and that we are loved dearly by God, it follows that loving our bodies and caring for them is a form of loving God. Also, Jesus showed us yet another way to love.

At the Last Supper, shortly before he was crucified, Jesus gave us a 'new' commandment concerning love. We were told to love others in a deeper and more costly way. In John 13:34, Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another". That is, we are to give ourselves in love for others as Jesus did—we are to sacrifice ourselves for the wellbeing of others. This may be experienced when we put aside what we intended to do, to assist another. Or it may involve words or actions that are more demanding.

As baptised Christians, we are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and like the parts of our bodies, we are all different, but guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit we are to work together for the benefit of all God's creation. Also, we are to love as Jesus loves, using our particular bodies, minds and spirits, created in God's image, to love and serve other Christians and *all* humankind, thus contributing to the building up of God's kingdom on earth.

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