

We're in a series called "Worth It." The idea is that each of us has people and pursuits that matter most to us, voices that speak acceptance and belonging to us. We give our time and attention to people and pursuits that tell us we matter. But what if we are asking more of these people and pursuits than they were designed to give? In our search to know that we matter, what if you could see yourself as God sees you? Jesus died and was raised to life to give you a new start. Why would He do that for you? Because you are worth it.

We have a lot of voices striving for our attention. Voices that promise great things, but fail to deliver, voices that cut down our humanity and cause us to question our value. Not only do we have voices speaking to us, but we find that sometimes the voice of shame, criticism, and dehumanization is our voice. As one Bible commentator put it, we have the "potential for divinely graced grandeur and sinful tragedy" (Charles Sherlock). Our hope in this series is that we would reset our understanding of who we are. By starting with who God says we are, we will change how we live and change our impact in our world.

We're going to return to the beginning of our story. If we're going to understand our identity, we need to start with God's original design of us. We will answer these two questions: (1) How do we understand our humanity in relation to God and people? (2) What does that mean for our purpose?

How do we understand our humanity?

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Genesis 1:26

In verse 26, we read that God created humanity distinct from all other creation. We see this distinction in two aspects. First, while all other creation is by command, human beings are handmade. Where previously we read third person declarations ("Let there be..."), now we see first-person action. God is directly involved in the creation of human beings. There is a divine plan, divine consideration, and divine involvement. As a human being, you are God-imagined and God-imagined. You matter to God. Even the order of creation shows God's care and concern for people. In the creation order, God provided every needful thing on earth - and then created humanity. God prepared the world so that humanity could be fully alive. As John Calvin succinctly put it,

"man was rich before he was born." God's direct involvement in creating human beings shows that people matter to God.

The second distinctive of the creation of human beings in contrast to all other creation is the pattern in which human beings are formed. In verse 24, we read that animals are created "according to its kind." But that is not the way for human beings. Man and woman were created in the "image of God." They were not created after an earthly pattern but stamped with the divine image. The ancient rabbis talked about this when they studied the first two chapters of Genesis. Chapter two of Genesis also describes the creation of human beings. The rabbis said that chapter two describes the creation of the physical body, while chapter one - our passage - describes the creation of the soul. There is something deep within each of us that is connected to the divine. We have intrinsic value because we are created in the image of God.

This way of the thinking was contrary to the common thinking in the era when Genesis was written. In the ancient Near East, only kings were said to be made in the image of (their) god. The biblical story declares that all humanity is stamped with the image of God. As humanity seeks to find its footing in the Genesis, this image of God-ness is repeated at key moments: highpoint of creation (1.26-27), after sin and leaving Eden (5.1), and following the Flood (9.6). To be in the made in the image of God is central to what it means to be human.

God-imagined people

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. v.27

Not only did we understand our humanity as intrinsically valuable because we are made in the image of God, but we understand our humanity in our connection to other God-imagined people.

God created humanity to be connected to one another. You can see this in the plurals in these verses - "mankind," "them," "male and female." Your humanity is understood as part of a larger community. You can see it in God's design to create Adam and Eve. God could have created two billion to immediately and individually to fill the earth. Instead, He created two people so that we would value our connectedness - that we all come from the same story, that we are part of people of the past, present, and future generations. That's why conflict is burdensome, losing a

person is devastating, and loneliness is disorienting. We understand our humanity in connection with other people. When we devalue a person with whom we interact, we are de-humanizing a person that God created in His image and one with whom we are united.

Jesus and Paul understood this. When Jesus talked about marriage in His day, He could have used myriad teaching in Scripture to support His point. Which passage did He choose? Genesis 1. We're connected to one another. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes an argument for our connectedness in his teaching on lying. He says not to lie to one another - why? Because it hurts? Because it's not right? No, his reasoning is don't lie, because you are connected to one another (Ephesians 4.25).

When you lie, you cut a gap in our collective story as human beings. We are not told what the image of God is, but it involves relationships.

So, in the creation of humanity, we see that people matter to God. Every person matters to God. You matter to God. You have intrinsic value because you are made in the image of God. And you are a part of a story that includes other God-imagined and God-imaged people. Central to your humanity is your connection with other people.

In light of understanding our humanity in those ways, what should we do? If we have intrinsic value because we are made in the image of God, and if we are deeply connected to one another in a collective story, how then should we live?

What then should we do?

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." v.28

We see that purpose in verse 28. God tells Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and increase." For Adam and Eve, this is a command to have children, to see generations of God-imaged men and women taking the image of God wherever they are. But these words are more than merely a command to procreate. This is a command to all of humanity of which Adam and Eve are representatives. Whether married or single, whether you have children or not, the call to humanity is to create life. To be fruitful and increase means to bring newness, goodness, God-imaged-ness into the world. You create life when you serve the homeless, comfort the depressed, and speak up for the marginalized. You create life when you honor your body, treat your coworkers with respect, and cling to hope amid darkness all around you. To create life means that you get in the dirt of healing, justice, health, truth, and forgiveness. From the dirt is where life is created.

But there is more. Not only is humanity called to create life, but each of us is given a space in which to do the work. The related

ideas of "subdue" and "rule" refer to using what you've been given for a greater purpose. God has given you a city in which to live, people with whom you work, laugh, and cry. God has given you gifts and passions, longings, and dreams. We're told in Acts 17.26 that God determined where you should live. You have been given a unique space by God so that you would see to the welfare of those people, places, and things.

How do you rule? You rule by living fully present, continually asking in each opportunity, "How I can create life in this space given to me?" It means listening to how life is, in turn, questioning yourself. Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychologist in Austria in the 1930s. Imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, Frankl observed that what led him and others to mentally and emotionally survive the horrific experience was a finding a sense of purpose, even in the unimagined space in which they found themselves. In his book on the experience, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl wrote, "It did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life."

What can you do with this? Adapt the perspective that life is questioning you. You are being questioned constantly, but we often miss the opportunity. We fight circumstances. We grind our teeth in frustration rather than getting our hands dirty in the opportunity. What is life asking you? And where do you need to ask of life, "I'm here; how can I create life in this space? When you create life, you are extending the image of God into new corners of our world and culture that desperately need to be renewed.

It's Already Yours

And as you do this, here is the beautiful truth that you carry with you, you matter to God. You already have dignity because you are created in the image of God. You are not going into your day in pursuit of acceptance; you already have it. You are not going in search of value; you already have it. You don't have to spend countless amounts of energy trying to matter to someone because you matter to the One whose voice matters most. Your value is not determined by human estimation, but by the divine voice. Your place is in the divine story of human connectedness. Your purpose is determined by the divine pattern of creating life.

It's not easy to live from that starting point of God's truth about you. It only took until chapter three of Genesis for the Deceiver to arrive. The Deceiver said to Adam and Eve that if they wanted to be like God, they needed to do something God hadn't given them to do. He planted the lie in their minds that human beings need to achieve something to be like God. The lie is so obvious, blatant, and ridiculous. If you had heard the Deceiver's plan beforehand, you would have thought that there's no way anyone would fall for that. They are handmade by God in His image. They are connected to one another in the divine story. They have

a divine purpose to create life. They don't need to do something to be like God - that is already theirs. Yet Adam and Eve believe the lie, and, as a result, life turns upside down. You and I fall for it, too. We believe the lie that something is lacking, that we don't matter, that we're less than, and that God isn't as good as we read about. It's easier to believe the lie than the truth. And we find ourselves in constant heartache and longing in our search to recover our humanity.

“Behold, the Man”

What is our hope? How can we recapture our identity as created in the image of God? This is the unique claim of Jesus. It shows up in unexpected ways throughout the Biblical narrative. One notable place is in the Gospel of John when Jesus is on trial (of sorts) before Pilate. John writes his story of Jesus' life with both explicit and implicit creation language. He sees Jesus as somehow connected to the Genesis story. You can see that in Pilate's words about Jesus. Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd of people who want to kill Jesus. And Pilate says to the crowd, “Behold, the Man” (John 19:5). Put another way, “Behold, the human being.” This is the same word used for “mankind” in the Greek version of the Old Testament. In Pilate's declaration, we're drawn back to the creation account.

Jesus stands as a human being - though not what we would expect. Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah described God in human form this way,

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Isaiah 2b-3).

It's a stunning account. God Himself steps into the story of humanity. Yet He does not come in power or royalty. He digs His hands into the dirt for a second time. In Genesis, His hands formed humanity; in the Jesus story, His hands are nailed to the Cross to recreate humanity. His death and resurrection open us to a new way to be human - fully embracing our intrinsic value as made in the image of God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2019 Central Peninsula Church South, Redwood City, CA
Catalog No. 1436-1SC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, August 4, 2019 at Central Peninsula Church South.

www.cpc.org