

April 13, 2008  
Colossians 1:15-20  
Genesis 1:26-31

“Created in the Image”

When I was a kid, I used to love to play with playdoh. Get it out of the little can, mush it around. Sculpt it into flowers and fake fingernails.

Make bugs and birds and pepperoni pizzas. And I loved using the playdoh molds we had too. They were molds for Star Wars figures, Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, R2D2. You put the playdoh in and squished it together and then, ta-da, you had a fantastic little blue image of Han Solo with a laser gun. Of course, if you tried to play with the little figures, they got smooshed and slumpy, but that was OK because you could just put them back in the mold, press them again, and there they were ready to go again.

For a long time, I think that influenced how I understood Creation. In the beginning, God was up there with the playdoh molding the world, smooshing and shaping it. Making crocodiles and eagles and bugs. Rolling out worms and snakes just like in Gary Larsen’s Far Side cartoon. And after six days of working, God does the grand finale and

makes humans from a mold in God's own image. Male and female God creates them, the Bible says, in the likeness of God.

Of course, it made sense when I was a kid that God made things with playdoh just like me. I came to find out wasn't very scientifically accurate. Creation was a lot more complicated than rolling out playdoh and smooshing it in molds. Creation took a long time to get here. With lots of living and dying and evolving and changing. A lot of chemistry and geography and genetics. A lot more explaining than we have time for today. But I learned from my dad that you didn't have to decide between science and the Bible. He said it was all part of Creation. Just think, this whole planet sitting just so in the universe at just the right distance from the sun, with just the right atmosphere. Just the right place for everything to live; everything from plankton to kangaroos to grizzly bears and birds of paradise. It's amazing, this whole complex wonderful creation. It's God's miracle. And we are just one very small part of it. But God made us a little differently. We were created to be unlike anything else. We were created in the image of God.

Now to some people that means playdoh. We are the literal, physical spittin' image likeness of God. Upright walkers with large craniums. Opposable thumbs. Big beards. That's how God looks in all his pictures. Well, I guess it's possible. But then we would have to ignore a good deal of the Bible. All those encounters with God, who ends up looking like a burning bush or a pillar of cloud or a rush of wind or a sound of sheer silence. People are forbidden to make any pictures of God and they aren't even allowed to look at God lest they die. So it's really hard to say one way or another whether we look like God.

Well, another possibility is that we are the image of God because we think like God. We've got reason and intellect and highly developed language and thought. That's what gives us our special difference from all the rest of creation. But more and more, we are figuring out that humans aren't the only ones that think. Prairie dogs and whales and birds, they all have been shown to have complicated languages.

Orangutans and gorillas have surprised scientists with their ability to learn sign language. And I'm pretty sure that if I gave the squirrels at my house the tools, they could build their own birdfeeder before destroying

it. I'm pretty sure we aren't the only creatures who can think. And with all of our fighting and bickering, I said we don't look reasonable either to the rest of creation.

Well, OK then, it got to be our spirit, our special God-given life force that means we are made in the image of God. Our morals, our love, our choice driven, conscience-filled souls that the other animals don't have. But try telling that to anyone who's had a dog that was their best friend or a cat that was part of the family. The way they know when you'll be home or when to sit with you when you're sad or when you are coming down the stairs with laundry. We know there must be some kind of spirit there. King David must have been a pet owner himself. He must have believed they were worth God's attention because in Psalm 36 he praises God who 'saves humans and animals alike.'

Humans are made in the image of God. From the beginning, it says there is something special about us. But it does not mean the rest of creation isn't special or conscious or spirited or praising God in its own way.

So if being made in the image of God doesn't mean we're made from some playdoh mold and we aren't the only ones who think or feel, what

does it mean? How is it that we are special in God's creation? Well, when the Bible was written long ago, an image or likeness was something very special. Kings put them up in the places they ruled. Back then, there weren't any radios to broadcast what the king said. They didn't have TVs or email to remind the world of the king's laws. And the kings couldn't be everywhere at once telling people. So they put up images of themselves to help everyone remember who was in charge. Prof. Russell Butkus at Baylor University says those are the same words used in Genesis. That's why God made humans. As images, living reminders to all of creation of who the Creator king is. Formed in the image of God to help creation know the God who made all things good. That's what makes us special.

So in the beginning, God created and turned creation over to God's images with the words, saying 'Have dominion over creation. Fill the earth and subdue it.' And so we did. And we got really good at it. We got good at representing God, subduing and dominating the world. We got so good that we forgot why we were doing it. Subdue. Have dominion. That was our job. It was what God wanted. And we subdued

and dominated and showed creation who was boss. Like good rulers, we took what we wanted, we paved what we wanted, killed off what we wanted, used what we want, profited from what we wanted. And creation is suffering. The earth is dying. And we have to start asking ourselves, which God are we representing? What God are we trying to remind creation of?

Have dominion. Subdue the earth. Thousands of years ago that's what God said to a bunch of nomadic Bedouins with little control over the creation around them. There were no convenience stores, no cars, no washing machines, no freezers. There was no electricity, no indoor heating or plumbing, no health care, no penicillin or neosporin. All you had were your tents and your family and a few herds if you were lucky. In the beginning, men and women didn't have much. And God said it like a promise, fill the earth, subdue it, have dominion.

Things are different. Life is different. We have so many ways to subdue and dominate and poison and fertilize. We have so much power to grow and harvest and mass produce and industrialize. We have drawers full of drugs and garages full of tools and warehouses full of stuff. We have

dominion. We work our own will on the world. So which God are we representing?

Own what you want. Possess what you want. Use what you want. It's all about you and your satisfaction. Don't worry about anything else. The customer is always right. It's about your convenience. Don't worry about others. God helps those who help themselves. Just look out for yourself and your rights and your lifestyle and your image. Your image. Not God's image. Not the image of the God we represent.

In the book, *The Little Prince*, a prince from another planet goes on a quest visiting other worlds. He meets a businessman on one planet who believes that by counting all of the stars, he will own them. "And what good does it do you to own the stars, asks the little prince. "It does me the good of making me rich." "And what good does it do you to be rich?" "It makes it possible for one to buy more stars, if any are discovered." "How is it possible for one to own the stars?" "To whom do they belong?" the businessman replied peevishly. "I don't know," replied the little prince, "to nobody." "Then they belong to me, because I was the first person to think of it," said the businessman. "Is that all that

is necessary?” “Certainly. When you find a diamond that belongs to nobody, it is yours. When you discover an island and it belongs to nobody, it is yours. So with me: I own the stars, because nobody else before me thought of owning them.” “Yes, that is true,” said the little prince, “and what do you do with them?” “I administer them,” replied the businessman “I count them and recount them. It is difficult, but I am a man who is naturally interested in important matters like this.”

Have dominion. Subdue. Use. Control. Take all you can from the earth because it's yours for the taking. Use all the animals you want. Hurt them, skin them, experiment on them, mass produce them. And use other people to reach your goals. You have dominion. You can make creation suffer. You are made in the image of God. But it is time for the people of God to stand up and say, which God are you representing? Because we believe in a different God. Not the God of power and wealth. Not the God of me first. We know the Creator is the God of grace and love and mercy. And that's the God we represent.

As Paul writes to the Colossians, we have seen the likeness of God. In Jesus Christ we have seen the fullness of God. He is the image, the

likeness of the invisible God. The God who delivered Israel from slavery. Who spoke for justice in the prophets. Who was made flesh and born in a cattle stall. Who opened blind eyes and healed the sick, and welcomed the outcast. Who commanded us to love one another. And reconciled us all by making peace through his blood on the cross. That is the God we represent.

We were created in the image of God. To represent justice and grace. To act with the power of forgiveness. To subdue the world with patience. To live not just with our own good in mind. We are created in the image of God. And we must work to stand for that image, not for the image of what is most convenient or most profitable. And it will be difficult. But we are people interested in important matters like this. And God has will continue to mold us and shape us. We are being shaped and molded together with Rick and Diana and Eve and David (Jessica, Beth, Andy), to be the image of God in the world. So let us proclaim to the world what image we are created in. Let us bear the likeness of God, the grace of Jesus Christ into God's good creation.