

19th October, 2014.

Reading: Genesis 1: 1 - 5, 26 - 27; 2: 15 - 18

Matthew 22: 15 - 22

Sermon: Made in the Image of God

I came across old pennies the other day with various images on them. There was Elizabeth II, George V and George VI and even an image of one of the Edwards. In the Roman world, it was the Emperor's image which was on the coins denoting power, prosperity and stability, even if the reality was a bit different.

The images of royalty, of course, appear in works of art, again portraying power. Some look even majestic. The image on older portraits is even more striking than the modern ones. King Edward, the son of Queen Victoria, had a portrait painted for his coronation and even the stance he adopted for that painting denoted power.

But images are simply that and they can hide the reality. According to Wikipedia the image hid his reputation as a playboy prince, something which soured his relationship with

his mother. She was not amused.

However, an image can be like a mask and we can all wear masks at different times to hide what is really going on inside us. There's a poem which I may have quoted before called The Mask I Wear. It's fairly long so I only share a short section of it with you. It starts off:

Don't be fooled by me.

Don't be fooled by the face I wear

For I wear a mask. I wear a thousand masks -

masks that I'm afraid to take off

and none of them are me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me but don't be fooled,

for God's sake, don't be fooled.

I give you the impression that I'm secure,

that all is sunny and unruffled with me,

within as well as without,

that confidence is my name

and coolness my game,

that the water's calm and I'm in command,

and that I need no one.

But don't believe me. Please!

Beneath dwells the real me in confusion,

in fear, in aloneness. But I hide this.
I don't want anybody to know it.
I panic at the thought of my weaknesses and
fear exposing them.
And the poem ends:
You wonder who I am. You shouldn't
for I am everyman and everywoman
who wears a mask.
Don't be fooled by me.
At least not by the face I wear.

We all present an image to the world. How often have we said when we have been feeling bad: we just need to put a face on it and get on with it. We present an image to the world, and image which is safe and which hides our vulnerability even if that is not always the image we want to show to the world. Sometimes, however, it is the only image we can show and it can be far removed from reality.

I was speaking to someone the other day about how conversations go when we meet someone for the first time. Inevitably we will be asked "And what do you? What's your job?" and our job becomes our image.

The woman I was talking to said it was particularly bad in the south of England. She was even asked on one occasion what her father did for a living and she was thirty at the time. The picture that people created of her, from what she said, was the image they would then keep. She would become her pedigree for them but what did that have to do with who she was, with what was going on inside her? What did that have to do with the real her?

Other people can create a mask for us which we then put on. We can conform to the image the world wants us to present but the trouble with that is that that mask is not the real you or me. We take on the role to fit the mask and often struggle to live up to the image that others have created of us. Please see behind the mask I wear. That was the cry of the person who wrote the poem.

On a Tuesday, I usually put on a pair of old trousers and an oldish top when I go along to Bumps, Babies and Toddlers because of the risk of getting covered in paint or gloop or glue.

Straight after the group one day, I went to

visit one of our elderly members because if I had gone home to change first, it would have been too late in the day to visit. I apologised for the way I looked because I wasn't portraying the image I wanted to portray. I looked really scruffy but the person I was visiting didn't mind at all. She saw beyond the clothes I was wearing to the person, to her minister, and that was all that mattered.

We can get so caught up in outward appearances, in the image we portray, created by our clothes, our jobs, our faces, that we can lose sight of who we really are.

When Jesus was challenged about taxes and whether taxes should be paid to Caesar, He asked whose image was on the coins. It was Caesar's which resulted in the response: **Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's** but what does that actually mean for us?

What is God's? Continuing with the image theme, it would appear that we are. The Bible teaches that we are made in the image of God. **God created mankind in his own image, in the**

image of God he created them; male and female he created them so Jesus seems to be saying that something with Caesar's image should be given to Caesar and something with God's image should be given to God.

That suggests that we are not our own, that we are God's in the truest sense of the word. When we look in a mirror, our image is reflected back at us. Have we ever considered that we are looking at the image of God?

To conclude that our physical features represent God is way off the mark. That would be to represent God in our image. The image of God is what shines through us when we allow it. The image of God is what shines through when we remove the mask, in the same way as we can reflect something of our parents even if we don't physically look like them. Image has to do with the attributes we possess.

Based on a book called **About You** by **John Staub**, an online magazine called **Relevant** made some interesting observations or suggestions about what it might mean to be made in the image of God.

Firstly, it is suggested that as human beings, we are creative because God is creative. **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.**

Brian Cox, on a programme the other night, could take us right back to the big bang and even a bit further back but in his own words, he still couldn't explain where matter came from in the first place or where the component parts of matter came from.

He spoke of there still being a place for the gods which means there is still a place for our God being the creative force behind the big bang and evolution. So God is creative but every human being makes things as well. Artists make things with paint. Poets, writers, philosophers and lawyers make things with ideas and their use of words. Doctors make people healthier much of the time. Consultants in business can make organisations more effective by using their creative powers. Manufacturers make things with raw materials. Chefs make things with fruit, vegetables, meats and spices. Every human being has the capacity to make things,

to create, because we are all made in the image of God.

As human beings we are also spiritual because God is Spirit. **The Spirit of God**, we are told, **was hovering over the waters**. Our spiritual nature, though unseen, is as real as our physical nature. Nurturing our spirit is as important to our spirit as eating, drinking and exercising are to our bodies.

At third attribute is our ability to communicate. In the beginning God communicated. He said **Let there be light**. Anthropologists agree that the sharpest break or the biggest difference between animals and humans is our use of language, our ability to think and reason using language.

A fourth point which is made in the magazine concerns the Word. We are told in Genesis that **in the beginning was the Word**. In Greek, logos, the word for 'word' means reason or logic. We each possess a mind, a way of thinking and learning, and Jesus said we should love God with our minds as with our hearts, our soul and our strength. Our reason our logic is a

reflection of the image of God.

The fifth point that is made in Genesis is that it is not good for man to be alone. When God created man and woman, it is recorded that He said, **Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.** That suggests that the very nature of God is relational - our image - which resulted in the creation of Eve in the story of Genesis. We need one another. No one can survive entirely alone.

The final point that is made is that we are morally responsible because God is a moral being. God said to Adam: **You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.** Just as there are natural laws that govern the universe, there are universal moral laws which govern human behaviour. There are things that are right and things that are wrong and these are written on our hearts.

When we fully grasp what it means to bear God's image, we can see our potential as human beings and we can also see the tragedy

of our unrealised potential. We all possess these godlike characteristics or capacities and the ability to use them in our own distinctive way. God made no duplicates. You are the only you there will ever be.

The question is how are we going to use what God has given us so that His image is reflected in the world around us? We have a responsibility to God to serve Him and the world in which He has placed us.