

Parish Retreat Session 2: Formed For Image and Identity in Community

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[0 : 00] our hearts as we continue in this time together. We pray that your blessing not only on the discussions but on a little bit later when we have time just to reflect contemplatively on what we're diving into today. We pray your continued blessing on Dr. Entz in your son's name. Amen. Erwin, I'll invite you back up to continue. All right. Amen. Well, I feel like, well, you might not. I feel like in the first session I was kind of just opening a fire hose and like shooting it at you. You might have felt like you were drinking from a fire hose as I was going through it with a lot of speed to skipping over stuff. But I was doing that to, and I do hope your discussions were fruitful. But I was doing that to get to this because this really is, that was important and laying a foundation, but this is where I was trying to get us to image and identity in community, that we are formed by God to image him and to be his image bearers in community. And so, right, we are, what does it mean for us to be image bearers? We talked about one aspect of that, which is so important, individual dignity, the way that we struggle to live that out in our own selves and the way we can devalue others.

But the other aspect of this is that we are made not simply to be individuals, but we are made by God for community. We are hardwired by God to commune with others. It is significant that the Lord says, let's make humanity in our image according to our likeness, and it says, so he made them, male and female, according to his image. Right? It didn't say he made him, it said he made them. So from the very beginning, we've been hardwired for community and communion with others. And so, for me, I skipped over, much to Pastor Tommy's chagrin, I skipped over the Herman Bovink quote, the last one. This one I'm not skipping over because this one is money. This is my favorite quote from Dutch reform theologian,

Herman Bovink, one of my favorite dead guys to quote. In his reform dogmatics on God and creation, in his section on the image of God, he says this. It's a long, but just stay with me.

The image of God is much too rich to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depths and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God are spread over many, many works in both space and time. So also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in a humanity whose members exist both successively, one after the other, and contemporaneously side by side. Only humanity in its entirety, as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth as prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation, only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God. What he's saying is that, yes, individual dignity, right? Immeasurable value and worth for each person, no matter what your status in life is. But you cannot get a full picture of what it means for humanity to be the image of God.

Unless you see all of humanity together. All of humanity, he says, summed up under a single head, that's Jesus Christ. All deemed humanity, right? What God has created us to do. As prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler exercising dominion over the creation.

[5 : 23] He says, it's the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God. And I would expand it, I'd nuance, Bob, to say the image of God is much too rich to be fully realized in one ethnicity or one race.

It's so much of how we have lived in Christian community is that the, what it means to be the image of God is, is summed up again in our ecclesial tribe, which is more than likely in this country, at least, monoethnic.

You can't get, so part of the point is, when we're lacking this diversity in redeemed community, we are missing out on facets of what it means for us to be the image of God. It has very practical implications. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians chapter 1 in this long, right, extended sentence in the Greek, this sentence of, this prayer and this praise, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us, here it is, the mystery of his will, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

including us. That Christ is the head. This word unite has the sense of summing up.

[8 : 19] summing up everything in Jesus Christ. Paul says, according to the mystery of his will. He's going to use that word mystery later on in this epistle. He's going to talk about the mystery of the gospel.

What was concealed before that is revealed now. What is the mystery of the gospel? That Jew and Gentile are together in one body. That Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility to make one new man from the two. That this summing up, this reconciling, this bringing back together, this reuniting what has previously been divided under Jesus Christ is God's plan and purpose. That's where we're headed. And so, Peter Lighthouse, in an interview he did recently, he had a book, a book that was published in 2017, that kind of commemoration of the 500 year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The title of his book is *The End of Protestantism*. And by end, he means in two ways, right? The end, the telos, the goal of Protestantism. But the goal of Protestantism is the end of Protestantism. That the Reformation wasn't started to create some new branch of the church. It was a calling to the church, back to the scriptures for the purpose of unifying the church, right? And so he says this, he said this in an interview in 2017 about his book. He says, the church is a sign of a cosmic unity that all things are summed up in Christ. And the church is to be the visible communion of human beings that anticipates the ultimate union of all things in Christ. It is a living sign, a community where that unity is already experienced in some degree. This is, he says, in some respects, the whole point of redemptive history, that God is going to knit back the human race in his son. And when the church fails to be that proleptic, that forward-looking reality of the eschatological union of all things in Christ, then we are very deeply failing in the calling we've been given. He's talking about the church, capital C, universal church, but I would apply it to the local church. That we, in our local community, that the local community is going to be the same. That the whole communion is going to be the same. That the world of the reality that God is going to knit back the human race in his son.

That we are a living sign of this. That the kingdom future reality has broken into the here and now. You should get a taste of it in our communions. Yes and amen. And when we are not living into that reality, we are failing, he says. We are very deeply failing in the calling in the calling that we've been given. You see, this beautiful community, this reality that we image God most powerfully as beautiful community, right? We are, to quote again from, this is John Frame, one of my favorite theologians, we are not merely the image of some of the divine attributes. We image God himself who is inseparable from all his attributes. And so if God's beauty is seen in his Trinitarian life as Father, Son, Holy Spirit, distinct, but one, unity in diversity, we should expect that beauty to be reflected in the humanity that images him.

Again, so while each individual has immeasurable value and dignity because we're God's image, the most significant way we bear his image is in community. We don't go far enough when we talk about the image of God if we only talk about individuals. If we only talk about you and me as individuals being the image of God. God is too immense. He's too rich and majestic for the totality of what it means to be his image to be summed up in a single person. So this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, he is preeminently concerned with renewing us in knowledge according to the image of our creator. It's how the apostle puts it, right? He talks about in Colossians and Ephesians these practical ways in which we are the image of God.

[14:00] And these are always, these are always in the context of unity and diversity. That's the expectation and the anticipation of the church in the New Testament.

And so in Colossians 3, when he's talking about, right, to put to death what's earthly in you, to put on, therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, to put on kindness and humility, bearing with one another. This is all in the context of your diversity.

And Paul says in Romans chapter 15, again, same kind of thing, dealing with Jew and Gentile in the Roman church. And they've been having conflict that's spelled out in Romans chapter 14, where some say you can eat, you should only eat vegetables, and others say, no, you can eat meat. Some say you can't drink wine, right? And others say, no, no, no, you can drink wine. And Paul is saying, do not, do not for the sake of food, destroy the one for whom Christ died.

And he starts out chapter 15, saying, we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for good.

[15:25] Because as it is written, he quotes from Psalm 69, for even Christ didn't please himself. As it is written, the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. Paul's talking about those who are weak in the faith, those who are strong in the faith. And he wraps up that passage saying, saying, therefore, right, may the God who grants endurance and encouragement, may he, may he enable you to live in such harmony with one another, that together you may, with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That you may together, in all your diversity in Christ, that you may together with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he says, therefore, welcome one another the way Christ welcomes you for the glory of God. This aspect has practical implications of what it means to be his image.

Bearing with one another, supporting with one another across lines of difference. I love this quote. From Stephen Guthrie, that book again I mentioned to you, Create a Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the art of becoming human.

He says, one may think of the Spirit much more personally and creatively as an artist whose one subject is the Son, whose one subject is Jesus Christ, and who is concerned to paint countless portraits of that subject on countless human canvases using the paints and brushes provided by countless human cultures and historical situations.

It is Jesus, the incarnate Son of the Father and no other, that the Spirit seeks to portray. And each portrait is successful and creative, not because it makes of him what he is not, forming him in our likeness and conforming him to our preferences and predilections, but because it uses ever new cultural approaches and historical situations to bring out more of the infinite variety of saving truth that is in him.

[17:49] That the one subject of the Spirit of God is the Son of God. He's the artist, he's the artist, and he is painting the portrait of his Son on countless human canvases and using different cultural and historic situations to paint that portrait, to bring out more of the infinite variety of saving truth that's in Jesus.

This is what it means to be a beautiful community. You know, in order...

Okay, I've got to read this one again. This one is good, too. All right. All right. What's my time frame again? You're good. I'm good. I'm not going to believe...

I'm going to believe her. I'm not going to believe you. Guthrie, again...

I love this. He says, The Holy Spirit is not an automated die press punching out stacks of Jesus copies one after another. The Spirit's perfecting work is creative and sensitive to the character of the material before him.

[19:12] Those filled by the Spirit are one body of Christ, renewed in his image, yet varieties of services and diverse gifts are given by one and the same Spirit who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The work of the Spirit is both particularizing or diversifying and unifying. The distinctiveness of each member does not destroy the unity of the body.

The unity of the body does not annul the distinctiveness of each member. The new creation will be beautiful because there will be harmony and right relationship between God and humanity, among humanity, and among all that God has made.

Each thing will be most truly what it is, and what is more and amazing, the utterly distinct character of each being will contribute to the beauty of the whole.

So again, this beautiful community, we're not about... It's not about... It's not about color blindness. It's not about doing away with any distinctions or distinctives in the difference.

[20 : 35] It is seeing the contribution of the image of God in each of that distinction, those distinctives. To see it as we come together contributing to the beauty of the whole.

And so, let me find out where I'm going because... I know you've got to at least quote a little bit more scripture.

John, in Revelation, talks about... There's a cosmic unity that we will see. A cosmic unity that's at the heart of the gospel.

And John sees the new heaven and the new earth, and he sees the holy city from Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband.

And he hears this loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them as their God.

[21 : 43] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And a significant part of those former things that have passed away, that will have passed away in the new heavens and the new earth is the pernicious polarization that divides us in the here and now.

And we know it because he talks about seeing the tree of life again in the holy city.

And he says that the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. That this is the healing that Christ is going to bring into full consummation in the new heavens and the new earth.

And again, again, the church is to be a forward-looking sign of that reality in the here and now.

[23 : 03] We're supposed to be pursuing that by the power of the Spirit in the here and now. I'm going to do this briefly. Do I have, what, about seven, eight minutes?

That's the time he says, yeah. I got ten. And Deborah says I got ten to fifteen. So, right, in my denominational tribe, the PCA, right, we adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

And it's amazing to me how little attention in our denomination. So the PCA is overwhelmingly white as a denomination.

We have about 4,900 pastors in our denomination. Fifty-five of them are black.

Thirty-six of them are Latino. And there's one Native American. There are about somewhere between three and four hundred who are Asian American, primarily Korean.

[24 : 17] And so, right, you know, as a black pastor in the PCA, we like to say we are the one percent. But I, when I speak in my denominational context, I say to our churches and our listeners, say, I'm not calling you to some new fangled thing, some new way of thinking about the church, some real new way to be, you know, culturally relevant in a society that cares about multiculturalism.

So, no, no, no. What I'm calling us to do is to live into our biblical and confessional commitments.

And so, chapter 26 of the Westminster Confession of Faith is on the communion of the saints.

And this is what they wrote back in the 17th century, right, in Westminster in England. All saints who are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory.

And being united to one another in love, they participate in each other's gifts and graces and are obligated to perform those public and private duties which lead to their mutual good both inwardly and outwardly.

They are obligated to perform those public and private duties that lead to their mutual good both inwardly and outwardly.

[26 : 04] And then they continue. It's the duty of professing saints to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as help them to edify one another.

It is their duty to come to the aid of one another in material things according to their various abilities and necessities. And here's the money sentence.

As God affords opportunity, this communion is to be extended to all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

This is in England. So you ask the question, how is it that Presbyterians who came to the shores of America, Presbyterian theologians, could write justifications for slavery?

How is it that you could be a slave owner and be an elder in a Presbyterian church in America? When every pastor and every elder has always had to say that I believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith together with its larger and shorter catechisms is an expression of the doctrine laid out in Scripture.

[27 : 30] You have to say that before you can be ordained. So they said, this is a duty. And yet they could say, oh, we will support laws in states like Virginia and otherwise that say, oh, yeah, no, no, no, no.

We're okay. You can convert your slaves because becoming a Christian doesn't necessarily mean you become free. How? Right? It is because, it is because we still, still, still, even in Christ are so tempted to get value, dignity, and worth from our tribe.

Which, which means we can devalue somebody else. Even though we know the Scriptures give us no warrant for that. In fact, the Scriptures give us warrant for the opposite.

I think, you know, there's a, there's a book, a hymn book, two-volume hymn book by James Weldon Johnson, who is the author of the, the Negro National Anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing.

He and his brother put together a book, this hymn book, called The American Negro Spirituals in the early 1900s, where he, where he put all of the, all the Negro Spirituals to music, right, for the benefit of the church, because it's not like most hymnals, you don't know who wrote those spirituals.

[29 : 16] They were formed and forged in a community. And, and he writes this beautiful introduction to the book, a poem called Oh, Black and Unknown Bards.

It's kind of an ode to the unknown authors of the spirituals. And this one line, he just says in the last stanza, you sang far better than you knew. For this to you belong.

You didn't sing of, of triumphs and, and war is won, but you sang of a, of a race from wood and stone to Christ. And I think about that, when I think about like the Westminster Confession of Faith, I say to myself, they wrote far better than they knew.

They wrote far better than they knew because, right, they were immersing themselves in what does the word of God say. And, and yet, they didn't know this kind of, of, of, of, of diversity and engagement and valuing of, of black bodies.

But because of the spirit, they wrote far better than they knew. All right, here's practical and we're gonna, we're gonna end here, I think. This is like, here it is again, back to the ghettoization of humanity.

[30 : 33] This article in the Washington Post in November of 2013 about the rise of super zip codes in America.

Right, these super zip codes are, zip codes ranking in the highest income in college education.

Right, and, right, the, if you can see in the bright, if you can see the bright, right, these are contiguous, in other words, contiguous zip codes of affluence.

And, you can see in America, right, that most of the super zips are in the northeast. And guess what?

The largest collection of these super zip codes are around Washington, D.C. You can literally draw a straight line of affluence from western Howard County, Maryland, all the way down to northern Virginia.

And, and never have to come across people who are in poverty unless you choose to. So, my, my point in this is that, right, the ghettoization of humanity is not simply ethnic and racial, it's socioeconomic as well.

[31 : 54] And that, that says something to those of us who are believers in and around Washington, D.C. Like, how do we press against, how do we think about pressing against the ghettoization of humanity not just ethnically, not just racially, but socioeconomically as well?

what does it look like for us to embrace the discomfort of pursuing beautiful community around lines of economic difference?

Because that can often be more challenging than race and ethnicity. More and more families live either in uniformly affluent neighborhoods or in uniformly poor neighborhoods, the article said.

So while race-based segregation has been slowly declining, class-based segregation has been increasing. And this goes back again, right, in the ancient world, right, the book, the TNT handbook for social identity in the New Testament.

One of the authors makes the point that ethnicity and differentiation was there in the ancient world as well as a powerful expression of the apparently pervasive human impulse towards social

categorization and differentiation, right?

[33 : 33] Israel saw itself as Halaos, the people. And then everybody else, the non, all non-Israelites were the ethne, the way we get the word ethnic from, right?

That everybody, if you were not an Israelite, you were an ethne, right? And so, so they began to live as if God chose them because they were Halaos.

They were the people, so God chose them. When God says, no, no, no, I didn't choose you because you were special, right? Matter of fact, you were the least among the peoples, but I set my love on you for you to be an example to the rest of the nations.

And so this is old, this is ancient. I wish I had time to play this, but I don't. I'm not going to play it. I am playing it, but I'm going to skip it.

All right, all right, I'll play it. All right, can you go back? All right, so this is kind of how it works. So I'm going to end here, all right? We'll end here.

[34 : 47] This is a song called Home, and what I'm trying to get at in playing this little clip is to embrace as a good thing the tension that comes with pursuing beautiful community, that it's going to seem disorienting.

It's going to seem disorienting when you say we've got to get out of these kinds of comfort zones, and we've got to seek the Lord for our communion to better reflect his kingdom vision, right? home. The name of this song is Home. So I'll put all my cards on the table. This is a song that was written by my son, my second-born son, over his project that he did sophomore year in college called I Heard God Laughing.

So this song is about there's no place like home. I want to be, right? I'm away. I want to be back home, right? And my daughter is singing the background vocals on it.

And what the clip I'm playing is of my oldest son, who's doing a spoken word piece. This is the clip. And so this is, he is talking about his challenge as a young black man in America, and the way it creates a tension with him for the faith.

[36 : 24] And so he is at a church that's majority white congregation where he is, and he has these struggles. And so part of the question is how do we embrace this kind of tension in communities?

All right, I'll play this. What I should have done is given you the lyrics to have in your bulletin, but I forgot. So you just got to listen, all right?

perhaps home is not a place, but simply an irrevocable condition.

James Baldwin. Today, it appears that the only peace this home can achieve is underneath the ground as opposed to above it.

Perhaps that was the original content. we are nothing but us, after all, fallen creatures suddenly degenerating until we become a whisper in the wind.

[37 : 31] A missing speech editor in Florida. A missing freedom writer in Texas. A missing body in a wedding in New York. A missing genius in a college classroom in Missouri.

A missing explorer on the playground in Ohio. When every stunt is a criminal offense. When every breath is considered an evil substance and your country is more quick to mourn the death of a lion than your own people, you can't help but question the carpenter's games.

How this whole comes with the understanding that you will always be your own, alone, that you are always deserving of the moment, the way, the water, the non-consensual, whether there ever comes a day from the perpetrators work a fluid system that is rooted and relegating you to the pressure, you must forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive.

Where is the joy in that? What is existence under perpetual threat? What truly is home underneath the burden of inevitable death?

It must be nice to never have to think about that. If only people loved the friend of gray just as much as they loved the white, white, only people loved John Crawford just as much as they loved their right to bear arms, and only people loved the gray's melanin just as much as they loved his music.

[39 : 01] I'm sorry that you feel guilty for the home you were born into. I'm sorry that you believe that you're blamed for everything. I'm sorry that you maybe know or have a black friend, a black child, and will support Black Lives Matter as long as it does not make you uncomfortable.

I'm sorry that you consider us ungrateful if only all conditions were created for people. There you know this act well for life ever come all right.

So, now, the whole song kind of tricks you because it's joyful and up and upbeat all the way up to that and then it switches.

But, right, this kind of, if we're going to pursue beautiful community, right, and we're, you have to be willing to step into that kind of discomfort, right, to say, all right, I need to learn from you, right, I need my preconceived notions, and we all have them, right, to be challenged, I need to be open to that challenge, I need to engage particularly across all of these lines of difference and it's just going to be uncomfortable, but there's, but we have to trust that there's a great joy in it that the Lord will bring because this is the work that the Spirit delights to do.

All right, stop. Thanks. So, yeah. Yeah. This is, this is rich, this is, this is meat, you know, this is meaty stuff, and one of the biggest challenges in having a conversation like the conversation about race in our country and in our church is, is that often we have, we have the experience of not even really knowing where to start or, or what we should be talking about or what it should look like.

[41 : 51] The value of this is that this is rooting that, that conversation that we all experience in different ways in our daily lives in a deep and rich biblical theological vision.

And so this is a great opportunity for us to take some of what is being laid out about what it means to be made in the image of God and how that can only exist and be most fully manifested through humanity as a whole, a diverse multicultural humanity, and then the implications that that has for the way we live and worship in our church at Church of the Advent, right?

So we're talking about this broad eschatological vision, the telos of the church writ large in the world, and then we're looking at how that then reflects on our daily life together.

And so if you're anything like me, when you hear stuff like this, in order to process it, you kind of want to talk to people about it and see what they think and bounce ideas around, and then you also just want to sit and think on your own.

And so we're going to have an opportunity for you to do both of those things. So between now and noon, we're going to invite you to get back in your discussion groups. There are some more questions for you on page four in your booklet.

[43 : 02] Spend some time wrestling through those questions together. Embrace whatever discomfort arises and see it as a kind of holy disturbance, a kind of, you know, often when God is doing his work, it's not comfortable.

A lot of times it's surgery. Surgery is not comfortable. And then around noon, we're going to switch, and from noon to 1230, there's going to be just contemplative time. Now you could use that to go to the bathroom or chat with friends or whatever, and you can do that if you want, but I invite you to maybe consider using that time to sit somewhere by yourself and just to think, right?

So there's this sense that we're going to stir a lot of things up and then you just sit and think and maybe even use that time to pray and ask the Lord to direct this toward you.

Ask the Lord, what is there in this that I really need to hear or wrestle with? What is there that has maybe challenged me or that I'm reacting against? What is there that I feel like I've been longing to hear and nobody's been saying?

What is there, Lord, that you have for me to chew on right now in the work that he's doing in your hearts? So let's do that. So discussion until noon and then from noon to 1230, contemplative time, and then at 1230 we're all going to gather in the dining hall for lunch.

[44 : 17] And then after that we have things we need to know, right? All right, a few just logistical things as we wrap up this morning. So first of all, if you're new, if you came to the way you can accept it, and if you're going to have to take ■ along, talk back to the game.