

Genesis 1:26–2:1

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Again, our scripture reading for today comes from Genesis 1, verse 26 to 2, verse 1. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image, and the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food, and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Let me add my own word of greeting to you this morning.

[1 : 4 1] It's so great to have everybody here. And what a thrilling and exalted text that we have before us. Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that this word from this text would be for our benefit as your people.

In Christ's name, amen. Attempts to create a utopia here, someplace that carries us back to the garden which was just read about there, ultimately fail.

That said, it doesn't keep us from trying, does it? Fictional literature especially is filled with attempts, and they sell quite well, given our appetite for a better world.

We want a world where the public good is permanently pursued, where economics naturally works itself out equitably, where governments and law codes are noteworthy for structural and systemic nobility.

We want a world where men and women in relationship are put right. And it's not bad to want such a world. In fact, we ought to be laboring for such a world.

[2 : 5 4] It's important. Who doesn't want the arc of justice to bend down and touch real ground rather than that pot at the end of our rainbows, which you chase and elusively never seem to arrive at.

I must say that capturing minds on the idea of a utopia is an exhilarating exercise. If I were a fictional writer, that would probably be the kind of writer I would want to do, to capture minds on a better or best world.

world. That is, until I would have to put my pen down and recognize that the world I'm living in is the one I have to return to.

In other words, that here is not there. Our world, truth be told, better resembles a dystopia than a utopia, in spite of all our far-flung imaginative creations of glory that would create it otherwise.

Now, there are reasons, good reasons, that account for our utopian failures as well as reasons that account for our aspirational efforts for some place improved.

[4 : 12] And that's where the literature of the Bible comes in. That's why we're finding our way back to Genesis. Genesis doesn't present us with fictional literature wherein something is imaginary, but it reveals to us that which was and is real.

You could actually consider the ghostwriter of Genesis to be God in the Spirit, revealing to us things about his world.

And in this literature, God is revealing rational answers as to why we human creatures long for a more better destination in this world, but it also recognizes why we have the perennial disappointments.

This is where we're at. And I've told you at the outset of the series that Genesis will provide a foundation for Christ Church Chicago. It will help us to begin thinking about God and ourselves and the world in which we live.

In today's text, we're squarely seeing what God has to say to us about us. That's where the focus is going to be. We're highlighting that sixth day in the creation account where God himself creates man and woman.

[5 : 33] And we get a chance to see the world before the world that we made a mess of, of our own making. And it's the goal in my heart that you'll recognize today that the God who created us, that same God who blessed us is the God who commends to us his plan that would both satisfy us no matter what your present condition is and it would show us how to take delight in him.

I want to come back to those three words, creating, blessing, commending. Those are the active verbs of the text itself. Keep your eye on them this morning because the argument about what God has to say to us about us revolves in the text along the logic of God creating, God blessing, God commending.

So let's ask, what do we see on creation's pinnacle day? If you're at home, I hope you have a Bible. I hope you open it up. I hope you put your own eyeballs on the text. What is here and how might it inform?

How might it interact? How might it even correct the way we view the world and ourselves and the way we live out our lives? First, we see right there, verses 26 and 27, we see God creating us.

By that I mean humankind. Then God said, let us make man in our own image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock over all the earth and over every creeping thing.

[7 : 08] So God created man in his own image and the image of God, he created him male and female, he created them. The active verb, God creating us.

Now let me just stop on that for a moment. That ought to encourage you this morning. You and I are not some creatures with accidental beginnings.

God set out to make humankind the pinnacle of all his creations. And it's the Bible that gives us the conviction that God endowed us with magisterial dignity, divine purpose.

Your beauty, your ontology, if you will, is unparalleled among all things in the created order. Did you know that? Did you remember that?

Do I need to remind you of that this morning? You should remember it. It's true. It remains true regardless of how you feel about yourself today. Regardless of what you think concerning your own person.

[8 : 10] The same God who created the heavens and the earth, who hung the stars in space, who gave boundaries to the seas, has created us to outshine them with all his shared glory.

That's what Psalm 8 actually exposed. That the God who is glorious actually shares with us his glory and the thrust of that shared glory rests upon the truth that he created us in his image.

That's what the text is highlighting. Take a look at it. Right there, verse 26, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And although he can't stop from tumbling from the form of which we were created to the function of which God has of this rule, he returns immediately in verse 27, three times, the repetition of image.

There it is. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. The repetition is clear.

Let me explain it. The image of God in you is the emphasis of God creating you. In the text, mark this down.

[9 : 27] The clear and central idea Genesis gives to you about you is this word image. It's a word that bestows upon you something incomparable, regal.

We are of inestimable value to God like face lines carved upon your soul's deepest, innermost part, so too God's divine image reflects the very favor of God back upon the world through us.

Where do you go to see God in the world? Through those who bear his likeness. And this is true in the text of both men and women.

Now this is at least worth celebrating within the church. We are equally image bearers. We are united in possessing shared glories of God.

Together we expose his radiance. Together we execute his rule. I just take it all in Christ Church Chicago.

[10 : 45] Ponder it. Consider it. It's stupendous. You could do this long into the afternoon and you will still be left reaching for analogies that are beautiful enough to communicate the full sense of what is said in these few verses.

The glorious kindness of God freely decided to be displayed in us equally as divine image bearers in the world.

No wonder, no wonder we are to honor and cherish every person we meet. No wonder we are to lift one another up from life's blows in this battered world.

No wonder we are to respect each individual, every person, no matter the color of their skin, the balance in their bank account, for they, we are beautiful in the sight of God.

That's the main idea of the text. It reaches to those heights. And part of me just wants to sit there for another 20 minutes and glory in it.

[11 : 55] But I'm aware that some of you want me to descend from those ethereal heights of ontology and consider the matters of practicality.

I mean, it won't take more than three minutes for those glorious truths in your community group this week to descend to questions on, but what does this imago dei precisely mean?

And we could go for an hour. In what way is this truth to be rightly told? And we could write a book. And some answers should be made even in the course of this sermon if incomplete.

Let me give it a run. We could remain here well into the night speaking of the image of God that is in us, his likeness in terms of our social ability, in terms of our forming of relationships, our mental capacities, our moral compass.

We could speak of our freedom of action, our responsibility to rule, but to do more than that is going to be difficult for to place those characteristics, almost like various grains harvested in answer to our question and put them in separate silos and record their contents in our groups into some codified entry by weight and size.

[13 : 20] It only robs you of enjoying the abundant table share in the goodness of God. And that's what I want for you today. That said, there are one or two things about the Imago Dei that this text, not my mind, but that this text features above the rest.

And so we ought to spend a little more time on what it considers rather than on what I am asking. Take a look at verse 27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created a male and female, he created them.

Notice, in this verse, humankind is created as one creation, but with two different yet equally glorious distinguishable persons, male and female.

That is the underscored feature that the text reveals about the Imago Dei. We are said to be like God then, not only in that he loans us a measure of his kingship and rule, but we exercise his rule through a vibrant, dynamic, relational plurality.

Just as there is but one God who exists in the plurality of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so too we are one creation with distinguishable persons reflecting the plurality of his very nature.

[15 : 02] And without the distinctions inherent in male and female union, we would not be capable of revealing the plurality of God's essence and his persons.

Now I know that this has implications for human sexuality. I won't explore those today. We'll do that in a few weeks' time as we close out the end of chapter two.

But we have things here, questions concerning Imago Dei, and we've already noticed that Imago Dei kinds of questions come from the sciences of philosophy and theology.

What does it mean to possess the image of God? But other questions come from this text from every corner. The hard sciences are wrestling with this same very text on questions related to the historicity of Adam, something that I hope to touch on in just a couple of weeks' time when we find him planted in the garden.

But what I want to consider over the next ten minutes or so with you are the questions this text raises from the arena of the social sciences. I'm thinking especially of questions over the relationship between one's gender and one's biological sex.

[16 : 19] These are the questions that are literally before us every day in the news and undoubtedly should be a point of conversation among us at the dinner tables even as we speak with one another and raise our children.

So it would be good to slow down and to provide a beginning of foundation for us as a church and learning from God's word how to begin thinking about these things.

I mean we might as well do it here in the context of a familial gathering where there is a love and care for one another. So first, some definitions are in order.

Look back at verse 27. Male and female, he created them. The terms male and female refer to one's biological sex.

By those terms, we're talking about the reproductive equipment that you were given to God at birth. That is to be distinguished from the words man and woman, which today often reference something different.

[17 : 28] As used today, these terms are not so much in reference to one's biological sex, although they may be, but they refer to one's gender. So today, things are not so simple.

There is a confusion that we all feel when we're encountering the relationship between one's biological sex and one's gender.

Gender, when it's viewed solely as a societal construct, is said to be more fluid than one's biological sex. Gender identity can differ from place to place and people to people, customs that are at times even regionally based or distinct.

For example, a man wearing a dress in Scotland may indicate something different about his own self-consideration on the matter of gender than it might mean for a man who does the same thing here in the U.S.

For in Scotland, the custom of wearing kilts has little to no bearing on being considered to be less than a man for doing so.

[18 : 40] In fact, in America, the world that I grew up in, a man meant, these barnacles that come alongside the meaning of man, meant that you were a tough guy. And this is why we have phrases like, be a man.

Or you'll hear someone say, take it like a man. Or you'll hear someone refer to a woman as, well, she's a tomboy. And yet, what does this convey to a boy growing up?

Let me say just a word about myself. When I was in junior high, those were the worst years of my life. I was thin.

Hard for you to imagine now. I was scrawny. I was picked on at times for that. People used to try to come up and see if they could put with their one hand around my bicep.

I remember wearing my down-filled coat to school every day, every class, no matter how hot it was, so that I could hide the inadequacies I felt regarding the societal constructs that were speaking to me about what it was to have been born a male and yet growing up into being a man.

[20 : 05] I had only one advantage over many that don't have that advantage today that are enduring it. And it was the advantage of some athletic prowess.

And so while I didn't measure up on many fronts, there was one arena that I excelled at that I could hold on to my own and continue to retain that sense of identity.

But what are we doing in this country for those who don't have that, who never feel strong enough, tough enough, or a woman who doesn't quite understand the femininity of things enough?

The degree to which societal constructs are or are not at work in gender, are the reason for our collective confusion and why things are only going to rise.

At this point, our country is in a very challenging moment. Depending on the person you're talking to, navigating the present terrain may not be easy.

[21 : 15] For most in the country, it's only an increasing source of contention. Some are arguing that we ought to do away with gender altogether. Others would advocate a hard turn back from the world from which we once came, whether or not it actually existed.

For some, personal pronouns are now decidedly a matter of private preference. For others, one's gender identity should always correspond to one's biological sex.

What I'm trying to state is there is a confusion that we all feel. Secondly, it's tied to the challenges that we all face.

One thing is increasingly clear. Our societal constructs have played a larger-than-life role in creating a world where to be a real man, you must like the color blue and only women would prefer pink.

Where real men must leave the home every day while real women simply stay home. Where men pay bills and women buy groceries.

[22 : 22] No wonder children are growing up and challenged concerning all the societal upheaval over gender and its relationship to biological sex.

We have an entire culture using the same terms in such differing ways for such diverse intent. And we're all swimming in the wake of it.

Let me give you just three quick examples even from this past week. On Wednesday of this week, the Wall Street Journal celebrated Kamala Harris' appointment to the office of vice president with this headline, quote, Harris breaks barriers on race gender.

In that instance, the paper is rightly celebrating in a rather traditionalist form the ordinary correlation between one's biological sex and one's gender.

For the first time, it says, we have a woman serving as vice president. Yet on Tuesday, the day before, the Biden administration celebrated what they referred to as the historic nomination of Dr. Rachel Levine to serve as the new assistant secretary of health at our health and human services.

[23 : 35] And if confirmed, she would become the highest ranking official of transgender person in government. And in that instance, we have one who was born male but prefers to identify as woman in the midst of our conversation.

And then, later in the week, the question of gender comes before us again through the presidential executive order that would protect one who was born a male in terms of biological sex to safely compete in athletic competitions that historically have been meant only for females.

And I raise these three examples to show the challenge that's before us. In the same week, we are being asked to celebrate a traditional understanding of gender, celebrate an individual's break with gender, and celebrate a third completely different understanding that blurs the lines not only on gender but on one's biological sex.

We're in a confused world. We have multiple challenges. Let me put it this way. The confusion we feel, that you feel, perhaps about your own person, and the challenges we face come from a collision of forces that are presently at work in the world in which we live.

We're all trying to create an improved utopia world. We're just not quite sure what that's supposed to mean.

[25 : 03] We know what it might mean for me, but we're losing what it might mean for us. What are we to make of all this? I want to spend the next and last moments of this message answering three questions.

First one is, what are we to make of all this? First, Christ Church Chicago should be known for compassion. That's what we should make of all this.

The swirling world in which we live with its incredible winds of change and force ought to place within the heart of every Christian, a deep-seated compassion for those that we meet, especially with our youth.

I can hardly envision navigating on my own these issues without the life experience of my parents behind me to assist.

We no longer live in God's garden. We dwell in the dystopia of our own making.

[26 : 24] And it comes with attending dysphoria that extend far beyond that of gender dysphoria. What is dysphoria? It's that thing that we all experience to one degree or another of dissatisfaction.

Dissatisfied with the world, dissatisfied with my life, dissatisfied with my capacities, dissatisfied with who I am or who people think I am supposed to be.

Dysphoria works its way out into depression, anxiety, the profound and recognizable disappointment on almost every level. No wonder all of these things are rising because the waters have come in on this question.

This is our collective lot is what I want to tell you this side of Eden. There's no way back to the text that we read. The question is how will we move forward?

We live in a land unfamiliar with any real soul-satisfying sense of euphoria. In three weeks time, we'll see what caused all these challenges.

[27 : 43] It's not yet evident in the text, but there will be a Christian hope and a gospel that comes in that will concur with our inbuilt sense that we were made for more.

And it will answer the sin issue that keeps us from walking out what his plan was. What are we to make of all this?

May Christ Church Chicago be known for her compassion on everyone we meet.

How are we to think about all this? For that, I want you to see verses 28 to 30. And I won't spend much time, but there's the text moves from God creating us to God blessing us.

And in one sense, it does so by a word I'm going to call continuance. How are we to think about this? There's something here about continuance.

[28 : 53] For some, compassion means that our minds are never to be challenged to change, and our conversations with one another are only meant to confirm one's personal choices.

The Bible will not allow that to any of us. This is just not the case. Learning to rethink in terms of connecting love to truth is an essential component of how we are to think about this.

And that's where verses 28 to 30 come in. Notice, the text moves from God creating us to God blessing us. And the point I want to make is this. There's something to be said from this text about the necessity of having to continue to think in terms of male and female, man and woman.

Remember, the image of God bestowed on us at creation was in the form of two distinct persons. One, but with distinguishable differences.

And the reasons for male and female in creating become clear in the purposes for which we are made, which are unfolded in his blessing.

[30 : 13] Two sexes, not one, not none, or even what is required to fulfill the plans God has for us in the world.

Without two sexes, humanity cannot sustain its own presence in the world in order to accomplish the plans of rule.

Male and female are required. It's necessary. Form, imago dei, is connected in the text to a blessing on function, which is propagation and rule, which requires that we continue to speak in terms of male and female.

Let me see if I can put the implications this way. I still believe that male and female are required. They're necessary in the text.

We can't fulfill what he wants us to do without it. If the Bible were a book on architecture, we had an interview today with a structural engineer. If the Bible were a book on architecture, which it isn't, this is where we would be talking about the necessary correspondence between form and function.

[31 : 28] You don't build things that don't fit the purposes for which those things are made. We don't do it. We wouldn't expect God to do it.

And for humankind, God's image is to form what our mutual purposive action on his behalf is to function. It would be a mistake to do away with male and female because it inherently undermines the purposes and plans God has for us in reflecting his beauty and ruling over his order.

Now, I know that thinking about things this one runs counter to the day in which we're living. At least I'm trying to say here is something for you to consider and perhaps interact with.

I think, actually, that would correct us. At times, we do need to be corrected about how we feel about ourselves. And if this is you, then I would love the chance to keep talking with you, as would anyone in the church.

That ways that we would come to a greater comfort with not only the biological sex that God gave to us and gifted us at birth, but how that works its way out in regard to how we rightly relate and rule in the world that he has confirmed this magisterial place upon us.

[32 : 58] God creating. God blessing. The third question I want to ask, though, is where do we begin learning how to live like this?

And that comes with the active verb at the close where we see God commending not only the manner in which he created us, but everything else that he made.

Do you see it there in verse 31? And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, here's the commendation, it was very good. As we are to have compassion on all.

As we are to hold to a continuance of male and female, which humbly upholds Eden's correspondence to our form and function.

You and I can grow together as a church family in personal confidence. You can gain greater confidence in who God made you to be. And you can have an ability to give yourself over to God's design by seeing in the text what God commends and what God celebrates.

[34 : 11] When God stepped back in the text and took stock of all that he had made, with man, male, and female before him. His commendation was, it was very good.

God celebrated what he had created. As good. Can you imagine getting to a point in your own life where you would begin to commend as good the very things that God celebrates as very good?

I hope so. It's one of the purposes that I think God brings us together as a church family. To help one another arrive at points in life where that which he creates and that which he blesses and that which he commends is the manner in which I begin to rightly think about myself and live under that word.

Let me just close by making a connection to Jesus from Genesis. In the Bible, Jesus is God's son.

Did you know that in Matthew 19, Jesus was asked a question that involved the permanence of this male-female relationship?

[35 : 41] The permanence of it. And he quoted this text, Genesis 1. In fact, we'll hear about this again a little later because he will likewise then quote a text from Genesis 2.

But he quoted this text in his answer. What he said was, in the beginning, God created man, male and female.

That the words of Jesus did not draw back from the commendation that this is what God has done. So Jesus is approving of what God is here commending.

And then he'll go on and he'll actually say, and by the way, when you're thinking about the implications, what God did, no one should be separating apart.

He commends it as unbreakable. He lists it as part of God's very good design. Jesus would have us learn how to celebrate it, even though we don't always feel it is something to be celebrated.

[36 : 54] Jesus, in fact, will do more than this. If we were to have another half an hour, we could talk about how Jesus defeats the causes of our dystopia. He overcomes our own dysphoria.

And on the cross, out of love, he gets us clear of the world in which we're living. Not that we can go back there and make the same mistakes all over again, but that rather he will secure us while here until he can do for us what he intends there.

And now I'm full circle. Utopias, trying to create something here that we read in Genesis there always fail.

But because Jesus has gone to heaven and is there, he can create something for us who are yet here. And he actually says he's building a family.

And he's building a house. And he's building a home. Think of your own home. These places where we feel individually so disjointed so often that even in our own bedrooms we wonder, who am I?

[38 : 10] And Jesus is outfitting a place for you and me to live together in ways that have overcome the world that we continue to try to create outside of him.

His heaven will far outdistance our imagined utopias. His heaven will be greater than all our purported improved worlds.

His heaven is what we actually long for, although we don't know it, as we continue to kind of construct lives without him. Heaven promises to be a place where each of us can rest.

Where we can exhale. We can finally exhale from the disjointed persons that we are. Jesus is a person who can transform us even now in beginning ways through the gift of his spirit, this animating spirit that will transform us into his likeness as we learn about him, as we read together in his word.

He's going to be greater for you than a social or societal construct of your own making. Jesus promises to remain with you. Jesus indicates that he's already gone away to create a place for you.

[39 : 43] The scriptures tell us that when we are there, our weeping will cease. The inner conflict of the depths of the life scars in our soul, where we feel we have not measured up to the constructs before us, it will be dried away.

Today, the assaults on your person will be ended. It will be likened. I can only, no wonder the scriptures call it an eternal rest.

It'll be a real place, not an imagined one, that out distances any and every utopia that we could dream up for ourselves or that we could give ourselves to without him.

Oh, Christ Church Chicago, may God's word strengthen hurting hearts this morning.

And may our lives glory again in the knowledge that we are created in his image, that we are uniquely, equally blessed for his purposes.

[41 : 14] And over time, may your mind and your heart be able to celebrate the very things that God here commends. Our Heavenly Father, we give ourselves to you humbly, with great need, in Christ's name, amen.