Genesis 1:26-31 (PM)

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[0:00] Well, good evening and my welcome to Willys. It's really nice to see you. If you haven't met me before, my name is Aaron and I look after the service. Last week, we started a new series looking at the first 11 chapters of Genesis and the Sunday just gone.

We look to the first five days of creation where God took something desolate and empty and with intention, he made it beautiful and functional and fruitful.
God made a home, a place to be with his creation and he wants it to flourish. And that brings us to day six, which is what we heard just read to us and will jump straight into us, straight into it here.
Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. There is a lot in there. We're just going to walk through it. Let us make man.
You probably know this, but the Hebrew word for man there means male and female. Let us make men and women. But straight away, did you notice the difference in this part of the creation?
[1:14] Did you spot it? Remember, previously, when God made everything else, he just commanded it. He just said, let there be light. Let there be an expanse.

Let the earth sprout vegetation. Let the earth swarm with living things, etc, etc, etc. But here, before creating the next bit of his creation, God announces it.
Let us make men and women. Now, I don't know if God was announcing it to himself, i.e. the Trinity, or whether he was announcing it to some heavenly gathering.
There's not enough to go in here to make a call on that. But there is some kind of conferring going on. And that conferring or that announcement marks out that this next piece of his creation is special.
It's been really good. What he's made has been fantastic. But this next thing that God does is extra special. And what is so special about humanity?
[2:18] We find that very quickly. Let us make man in our image after our likeness. So that's what's special. These new creatures, us, were made in God's image and likeness.

And it sounds just brilliant, doesn't it? But what does it mean? Well, the idea of image. There's a lot being written about this.
But the idea of image. For the early readers of Genesis, this would have brought up the idea of statues. Statues.
Back in the days, kings and queens would put statues in the places that they couldn't be. To remind the people that the king or the queen was in charge.
Even in that place where they couldn't be. That that place was under the king's care. So the statue, an image of the king or queen was there to represent the monarch in that place.
[3:24] So do you see what it's saying? It's saying we, humanity, this part of God's creation, we are going to be God's representatives in the world.

It's saying that God has chosen a way of being represented to the world. And it's through people. I'll say it another way.
God says, these humans will be my co-rulers, my co-agents, and running this really great thing I've just made. And doesn't that say something about the generosity of God?
Doesn't it say something about the kindness of God? The supreme ruler and creator of the universe. And what does God do with that authority?
He gives some of it away. To people. Now what are the implications of this? Well for us individually, being God's representatives to his creation.
[4:26] This is, this is, it means that that's a huge part of what it means to be human. And today we spend so much time trying to invent or make out what it means to be human.

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And there's so much pressure on yourself to work out your purpose in the world and who you are and your identity and how you relate to the rest of the world. And asking yourself these questions about, do I matter? And am I important?
And where do I fit in? And all of that stuff. And the result of these questions is often just this sort of crushing weight. But here God addresses us.
He says, you know, you're made in my image. You're God's co-ruler. I mean this should liberate us from some of these crushing existential questions.
I think the second implication of this for us as a community is it does change the way, it should change the way we treat each other. And the early Christians really latched onto this idea that we were made in God's image.
[5:33] Remember, the ancient dynasties would really play up the concept, the belief that only kings and queens were the image bearers of God.

But our faith says no, it's all of us. To be an image bearer, a co-ruler of creation, all you had to do was be a human.
As I said, the early Christians really latched onto this in terms of how they treated others. I mean we take human rights for granted nowadays, but back in Jesus' time, no. For example, children were not even regarded as human until they were named.
So people could just throw them out. It's why archaeologists would find all these tiny little skeletons when they dig in the ancient dumps.
Because people would throw out babies they didn't want, especially baby girls. And in 0 AD there were two groups of people who would scour the dumps searching for babies.
[6:41] Two groups. Slave traders and Christians. The slave traders were searching for children to exploit them and the Christians were there to rescue the babies.

Because throwing away people, that's not how we treat image bearers. So the implications of Genesis 1 here, I mean they're huge.
If we are made in the image of God, surely that just takes an axe to racism and ableism and sexism and elitism and eugenics and abortion.
I mean the list just goes on and on, doesn't it? Let's move on to that other word that's in this first verse though. Let us make men and women in our image after our likeness.
Okay, so what does likeness mean? Why did they add that extra word there? Is it just a synonym? I don't think so. There's more going on there. It's saying something. And I think it means a couple of things.
[7:44] It's a reminder that we're made in God's likeness. I.e. we're not God. We're made in His likeness. We're not the original.

We're a derivation. I think that's the first thought. The second idea here is that if the image word means that we represent God, the likeness word means we do that in a God-like way.
So let me just unpack that a little bit more. Okay. What would that look like? Well, I think what it looks like is explained in verses 26 and 28. Let me remind you of those. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.
Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. So, to be God's co-rulers, image part, we do it in a God-like way.
What does that look like? It looks like what that says just there. That's the description. But I know what you just heard. When I read that whole thing, you heard a couple of words there that you didn't like necessarily.
[8:59] Dominion and subdue. And you're thinking, that's not, that doesn't sound right. You might hear these words and go, well, look, that's the problem with the world, isn't it? People trying to dominate it.

Well, it's lost a little bit in translation. What it's trying to say here? What is it trying to say here? Okay. We rule like God. That's how God rules.
And how does he rule? He subdues. And he fills. Again, I know that doesn't sound attractive or green or nice to creation, but just bear with me here.
I'll make it even worse, okay? Subdue is a military word. It actually means to trample. And again, I know what you're thinking. Like, no, no, stop talking, stop talking. But think about it.

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A vegetable garden. If you lift a vegetable garden without any tending, it's going to get completely overrun. It will cease to be helpful.
[10:05] You actually have to dominate it. You have to subdue that space in order for it to flourish and be fruitful and useful.

Later, we hear about Adam and Eve. Later in Genesis, we're going to get to Adam and Eve, and it's a great story. But one of the things we'll learn about Adam and Eve is that even in paradise in the garden, they were given work.
They were given work to do. They had to get it under control. It had to be tendered. God in his creation, remember, took something formless and useless in order to create the best scenario for life to flourish.
He subdued it. He dominated it. He shaped it. That's how God rules. And we are to rule in God's likeness. To subdue, to dominate.
I know, sounds bad. But it means tending in order to make this thing work. So that means we don't exploit the world. We don't exploit people.
[11:11] We don't exploit resources. We aren't cruel to different parts of creation. We care for it. We create the best opportunity for flourishing because that's God's model.

It's what it looks like to be made in the likeness of God. And at various points in church history, we've been good at this and bad at this. I'll give you a couple of just good points.
The RSPCA. Do you guys know who started that? It was Christians. It was 21 Christians and one devout Jewish man started the RSPCA, including William Wilberforce, who was the abolitionist.
They did tons of stuff like that. The monasteries introduced this idea of crop rotation. We want to treat the land with respect. This is not crazy greeny stuff.
It's actually just in the Bible. The law of Moses is don't muzzle an oxen because if you do, it can't eat. Don't overwork your animals. Give animals a Sabbath, etc. This is reiterated if you slide your eyes down verses 28 to 31.
[12:18] God says, I made a really good thing here. It's great. It's animals. It's birds. It's fantastic. I made a home for you to be with me.

Look after it. Care for it. That's going to require some subduing. It's going to need some controlling. But care for it and care for one another.
Now, the elephant in the room, of course, is how are we doing on that front? And the problem is we haven't always been great image bearers. And we haven't always operated in a God-likeness sort of way, have we?
In fact, we can say we've probably failed on a daily basis. So I want to finish now with just a reminder. A reminder of God's response to our failure.
And it's Jesus. Christ came not just so we could have peace with God. Not just so we could get into heaven. Not just so we'd be forgiven.
[13:19] But to restore us. Paul talks about this in Corinthians. Let me read 2 Corinthians 3.18 to you. He says that, So we come to Jesus.

We ask for forgiveness. And we pray, God, sanctify me. It means, Holy Spirit, remake me. Continually remake me. Make me more human, is what we're praying. Remake me continually into the image and likeness of God.
So what are the big ideas? In all of God's creation, humanity alone bears the image and likeness of God.
God made it like that. We're a special part of creation. God made it like that so that we could be God's representatives to his creation, to care for it, co-rulers, co-regents of this planet.
[14:31] And when we fail, we're kind of like a really beautiful, expensive, well-made Swiss watch that doesn't keep time.

So what do we do? We keep coming back to Christ to find our humanity and our call. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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