

Pastor Kenneth Mars
Christ the King Lutheran Church – Cody, WY
Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 27, 2025
Text: Matthew 5:17–26

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One of the great teachings of the Bible is that God created man in His image. It's recorded in Genesis 1:27:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

These are beautiful, powerful words of truth that give us insight into what it means to be human. And it teaches us something about God. The almighty, majestic creator of heaven and earth gives of Himself to the world, to every man and woman. Every human being reflects God's image. There is not a single person you meet on the street, at the store, in your family, who does not possess this God-given quality.

While Christian theologians have always pondered this great truth, it seems this doctrine has grown in significance in recent decades. There is hardly a month that goes by that I don't hear or read something about the *imago dei*, the image of God. In some ways it has become the all-encompassing idea when discussing human dignity, the purpose of man, and how he and she should be living in this world. For example, man's rationality, intellect, sense of right and wrong, imagination, his lordship over the natural world, the exercise of his will, that he is more than a glob of biochemistry reacting to natural laws. All of these things are considered aspects of man being made in God's image. It's all gloriously true.

This doctrine has given rise to many institutions and cultural practices that most people take for granted. The establishment of hospitals, orphanages, and places of human care find their origins in Christian lands, where the Bible held a prominent place of authority. Universal human rights, equality under the law regardless of birth, status, or wealth, principles of just warfare, the elevation of women and women's rights, the protection of children from exploitation, general levels of education for all people, and just about any idea, law, or cultural practice that says every man, woman, and child has dignity and value arises because of Christianity. That all people have inherent dignity and should be treated accordingly, is uniquely a Biblical idea established upon this teaching: man was created in God's image.

As I said, I see the *imago dei* invoked, discussed, and championed on a regular, frequent basis. And for good reason. Our culture is quickly moving away from its biblical foundations. Only a rejection of the Bible, and plain human reason, can lead to an assertion of more than two sexes, male and female. The rise of modern, totalitarian states also points to a rejection of the Bible and each person's unique, dignified place in this world.

There is a new barbarism on the rise in the world where the sheer use of power is the only rule. Christians are responding to these challenges by confessing to the world that God made man and woman in His image. Not the state, not governments. People bear God's image.

The Church is responding by invoking Genesis 1 while also declaring that God's eternal Son, became man in order to redeem mankind from the ravages of sin, death, and evil. The biblical witness is that God created man, in the beginning, in His image. God redeems man from sin by the incarnation of God's Son, the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth the world sees perfect God and perfect man in one person. Through His righteousness, His bitter sufferings and death, and by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has bestowed upon mankind a royal dignity that even the angels marvel at and rejoice in. It all begins in Genesis chapter 1 with the *imago dei*.

But I also have some reservations about the current use of the image of God doctrine. I fear it is being used indiscriminately without regard to Genesis 3, man's fall and original sin. It's as if we haven't paused long enough to ask, "Does man after Genesis 3 retain the image of God?" I rarely read or hear that question being asked. To be sure, Christians all recognize the reality of sin and evil in the world. But there is a disconnect. On the one hand, Christians indiscriminately declare man is made in God's image. And then, on the other hand, decry the wickedness of sinful man. To put it bluntly, people created in the image of God are doing those evil, wicked things.

Until recent times, Christians have taught a much more reserved, muted doctrine of the image of God and its application since Adam and Eve's original sin. Martin Luther, for example, wrote that man has lost the image of God, at least, when compared to Adam and Eve in Garden of Eden. Most of our Lutheran theologians, before the 20th and 21st centuries, asserted that man retains certain aspects of the image of God. But it is thoroughly corrupted and broken. The sermon hymn for today, written by Lazarus Spengler in the 16th century, said this about the image of God in man. Stanza three of "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall" (LSB 562):

From hearts depraved, to evil prone,
Flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;
God's image lost, the darkened soul
Seeks not nor finds heav'nly goal.

Spengler's hymn is consistent with the biblical witness that says there is nothing in human nature that isn't tainted by sin. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). All are conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5). There is none righteous, no not one (Psalm 14:1-3; Rom. 3:10-18). Such is the biblical witness of the human condition. Mankind needs a redeemer.

A doctrine of the image of God broken in mankind after man's original sin is much more fruitful. And it gives greater clarity to the Christian gospel, the

place of Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love for life in this world, and the hope of the world to come.

In Exodus 20 we heard the giving of the 10 commandments. We memorize them in catechism class. And we sang about them in Luther's catechism hymn. And well we should. For the 10 commandments reveal God's eternal will for His redeemed people. The divine image in Israel of old had been shattered by sin, from within, inherited sin, and from without, the sins committed against them. But God promised to be their redeemer. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). He saved them, redeemed them with a mighty hand of power, through Passover blood shed to atone for their sins, and in a watery new birth through the Red Sea. The 10 commandments are a summary of God's will for humanity, especially for those who call upon Him as Lord and Savior. They apply to us as Christians, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

But the commandments, by themselves, cannot give us the redemption sinners need. In fact, they reveal how broken and marred the image of God has become in each of us. The Law reveals that we are sinners and condemns us as lawbreakers worthy of divine, eternal judgment. The soul that sins will die.

It is this backdrop – the marred, broken image of God in each person revealed by God's Law – that makes Jesus' claim in the gospel all the more amazing. Matthew 5:17, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The Lord Jesus claims that He fulfills God's Law; He fills it up with Himself. Jesus doesn't set aside the Law or declare it to be irrelevant or unimportant. In fact, quite the opposite. He upholds the Law and fulfills it. The law is God's eternal will for man. The 10 commandments describe Jesus, perfect God and perfect man, in one person. The image and likeness of God is seen perfectly in the man, Jesus of Nazareth. His sinless birth, His righteous life, His love and compassion for the poor, the weak, the imprisoned, the dying, sinners of every kind, His

preaching, teaching, and miracles, His suffering and dying on Calvary's cross, His glorious resurrection from the dead, and His ascension to the Father's right hand in glory fulfill the Law. In Jesus, the image of God in man is restored and perfected.

Your Christian baptism given in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit gives you the image of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Not the first Adam, but the second Adam, Jesus the Christ. United to His death, you are most certainly also united to His resurrection. Therefore, says Paul, you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). In his letter to the Colossian Church, St. Paul writes,

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God...⁹ seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:1, 9-11).

The image of your creator has been renewed in you through Christ. It is truly marvelous that every man, woman, and child is made in God's image. But that's not the heart and soul of Christianity. That God the Father has restored and perfected the image of His Son in sinners through the Gospel is the lifeblood and hope of the Christian faith. Christ is all and in all. Jesus is our hope, our glory, and the highest good. In Him, we are restored and perfected.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Exodus 20:1–17

¹And God spoke all these words, saying,

²"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹²"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³"You shall not murder.

¹⁴"You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵"You shall not steal.

¹⁶"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE READING

Romans 6:1–11

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING*Matthew 5:17–26*

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the fifth chapter.

C: Glory be to Thee, O Lord.

¹⁷[Jesus said:] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise be to Thee, O Christ.