

THE STORY OF HUMANITY

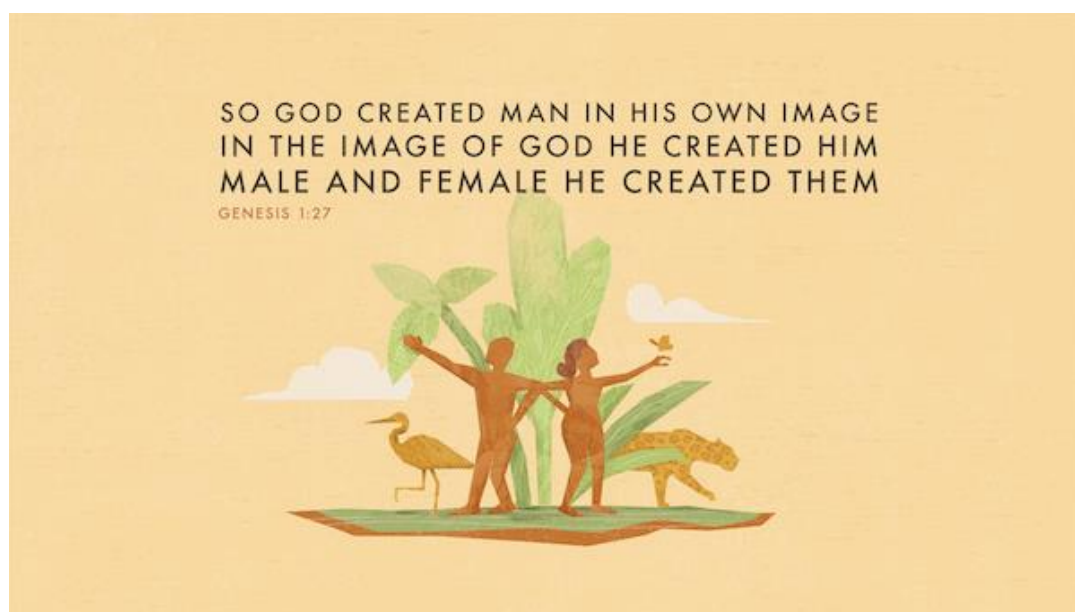
THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATION

03 OCTOBER -06 NOVEMBER 2021

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD – IMAGO DEI
(03-09 OCT 2021)

INTRODUCTION

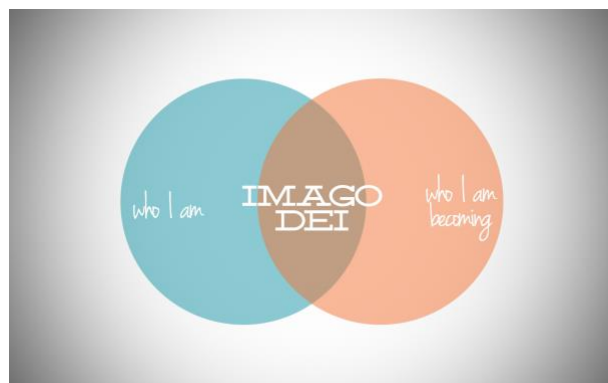
The story of humanity can be traced back to the story of God. According to the Hebrew traditions and authors human beings are intricately interwoven with God. The birthing of humanity is as complex and complicated as the controversy of humanity's behaviour. The human nature has honoured God and most of the time dishonoured God. One thing still remains though the abiding love of God with human beings. Even this love is a complex nature of God interacting with human beings. We cannot just simplify this love, but we need to appreciate its deep commitment to the relationship that exists between God and human beings. At times, if not most of the time, this commitment is one-sided with very little effort from the human beings to respond positively to this love. There is manipulation, neglect, rejection that later leads to a deep longing for something better – God.



The Human Being – One of the treasures of creation is human beings. This treasure can be viewed from the investment God has put out in creating human beings. The detail we get from the two creation stories helps us to realize the strides God has taken when creating the human beings. When God first created the rest of creation God said, “Let there be...”, but when it comes to human beings God said, “Let us make...” This is a huge shift from just speaking to being focused and even to the point of God addressing Godself. God was not going to leave the creation of humanity just to creation, but God in person would be involved.

We also learn here from the Gen 2 story that without a word from God, God *'formed'* human beings. This requires us to pause a bit. In the first story God

makes, here now, God forms. In both instances, unlike the shrubs and things just appearing, with human beings there is a process of putting the human being together, either making or forming. Whichever word of these two that we come across; God must have taken time in creating human



beings. We did not just happen, we were made, formed. This is a huge investment by God. The investment is quite personal. It takes God and the Co-Creators – the “*Let us*” for human beings to exist. So, it not just the question of emerging among the creation, it is a question of existing even to God, hence the human beings.

REFLECTION

How do you feel about us having been formed and not just happened? How can we best respond to this initiative by God?

God in creation – The existence, the being of humanity points to the existence of God in the world. The signature of God in creation is in humanity. It is not just the fingerprints of God as God was forming us, but the very presence of God. God could have just left things at ‘Let there be’, but God says, “Let us make human beings in our likeness.” There are two Hebrew

words that speak of likeness in Gen 1:26, 'tselem'(same shape) and 'demuth' (perfectness of an image, conceptually and not just the stature). Both these speak of resemblance. This resemblance is not just the outlook, but the character as well. This is emphasized by the Gen 2 story where God breathes God's Spirit into the human being, so that the human being becomes a living being. This emphasis in Greek is known as 'homoionoma' – form in resemblance. The form in which we fashion our lives should and must meet the definition of 'homoionoma' so that our lives resemble that of God, purely because of our very form that resembles God's form, not just in the physical, but in the inner being not seen to the human eye and yet seen through the eyes of our interaction with others.

REFLECTION

What are some of the helpful ways in which you can express the presence of God in the world?

Humanity in the Image of God – There is a common notion that to be



human is being nothing else besides God. Often this is associated with our sinfulness. When people mess up, they often cry out, "I am only human." This is not a helpful expression when used under such circumstances. Gen 1:26 says it clearly to be human is to be made in the Image of God (Imago Dei). This is the first and the foremost important understanding of our nature. The more we become

like God the more we express our humanity, the less is the more we struggle to express our humanity. We therefore cannot claim to be human when we have acted contrary to God's nature. We should always thank God instead for our humanity whenever we have glorified God with our lives. We ought to breathe in Godliness and exhale the same. In other words, our lives ought to be life-giving if our humanity is to be better expressed. This breathing in and out is the manner in which we offer others a breath of life in thought, words and deeds so that the world may breathe in life and as a consequence learn to exhale life. God gave us this rhythm of doing life, and yet we struggle to make our lives dance to it.

REFLECTION

What is the breath of life that is mostly needed in the world today? Why is it important for us to always remember that we are made in the Image of God?

Blessed to be a blessing – The presence of God in us is a gift. God breathed the breath of life; and a human being became a living being in Gen 2:7. Theologically this is known as *creatio ex deo*. We did not ask for God's Spirit in us. God gave this to be a gift not only to us, but the rest of creation. Gen



1:26b tells us how God had envisaged the relationship humanity would have with the rest of creation. We are to be responsible for the rest of creation. In other words, God put trust and I prefer to use faith in us as human beings. An element of trust goes hand in hand with faith. Trusting is strongly believing that things would go as intended, even though things could go wrong, but with faith there is affirmation, reliability, dependability. All of these may not necessarily be based on anything, except faith in the person. Such faith then could be known as grace. The goodness placed on the other without them having done anything to deserve such a favour and goodness. God trusted human beings before they could prove themselves to be worthy. God blessed humanity with Godself through the gift of the Spirit so that human beings can be a blessing through stewardship to the rest of God's creation. So, God extended Godself through us, with the hope that we too would extend ourselves through creation. This ecological footprint would bring so much life to the rest of creation if taken seriously.

REFLECTION

If God is a gift to us, how can we be a gift to others? What practical steps of your discipleship can you take to ensure you are extended by God to be a blessing?

The dominion is often mistaken to be about control rather than governance. Governance as we have come to know and appreciate often refers to the structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability,

transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity, inclusiveness, empowerment and broad-based participation. In terms of creation this governance would stem out of what God did in the beginning. Creation was designed by God to rise to good governance.

Transparency – God chose to do all God’s work not in secret, but in front of the heavenly community – “Let us”.

Responsiveness – Darkness responded to God’s Word and released the light. The oceans gave way to dry land, etc. There was no rigidity or obstinacy.

Rule of Law – the sun would shine during the day and the moon at night. Should this balance be disturbed, life as we know it would certainly be destabilized.

Stability – The order brought by governance brings stability and harmony. The cooling of the earth is needed for a certain number of hours and the heating up thereafter, otherwise there would be no sustainability.

Equity – When God created human beings in Gen 1:27, they were created male and female. There was no supremacy or superiority. God blessed them in Gen 1:28. We do not hear that one gender was given more blessings than the other. God gives equal fair chance to all.

Inclusiveness – Gen 1:26 is strong on this. There is also Gen 2: 19 also giving an indication of God giving the responsibility to name the animals God had created. God is in the business of forming partnerships with us.

Empowerment – The notion of Gen 2:18 and 21-25 points to God giving inspiration to Adam to the point of signing a poem of affirmation. This also goes to the extent of authorizing Adam to craft with his wife new values that would enable more life for the two of them as a man clings to his wife leaving his mother and father.

Broad-based partnership – Right from the beginning all of creation works together. Each part of the Creation has its own value to add for the economical viability of God’s household.

Accountability - All of these above are not only about the governance of this world, but the governance of God’s world. Human beings are called to always exercise good governance; it is our responsibility. We remain accountable to one another and to God. When we fail to do this, the rest of creation screams for justice. Global warming is such a scream because of our lack of stewardship for God’s work.

REFLECTION

***Why is this governance so important, especially for us Christians?
How can we inspire others to live in the same way?***

One with Creation – For many centuries the theology that has been upheld



is that of domination, superiority and elevation of humanity above the rest of creation. Scholars these days after carefully examining the Creation Stories have come to the realization that not only can God create something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but God has created other things out of what God had already created (*creatio ex materia*). There is a sense of advancing life from primary to secondary life. Even human

beings owe their being to this sense of advancing life from dust to living beings. The basic components of life are not without basic matter that is found in all of creation. No wonder when all is said and done, we go back to dust and our spirit goes back to the Giver of this life-giving breath.

REFLECTION

We all share the same DNA with creation. How does this statement make you feel as a child of God?

We are one with creation also by the fact that we cannot sustain our lives, except to be nourished by the very creation. This interconnectedness creates a sense of interdependency, purely because we are one with creation. At best

creation can thrive without us, but we cannot be without the plants, water, insects, birds and animals. We must respect take care of the creation that sustains us. Our actions can drive as they have in some cases driven creation to extinction. Our lack of appreciation for the environment is doing more harm to us to begin with as it makes other creatures to struggle to survive. Where creation has been left alone by human beings, it bounces back and flourishes. Our footprint at times is unerasable with dire consequences. We look at the rivers today and we have polluted the fresh water and now there is shortage not only because of the global warming, but also because of contamination. The burning of fossil fuel has fast tracked the climatic changes and brought in adverse weather conditions that lead to drought and floods. These conditions threaten food security. We are one with creation and therefore we need to act responsibly.

REFLECTION

How has your life been sustained by creation? What can you do to assist with the continuance of this sustainability beyond just yourself?

CONCLUSION

Humanity is the continued presence of God in physical and practical ways. This presence should translate to us becoming a gift to the rest of God's creation as God became a gift to humanity. Life is not a reward to us, but an absolute gift as God formed us out of love rather than being forced to do so. As God blessed us with life, God saw it fit to entrust us with the work God had created. This gives us a huge privilege to hold such responsibility on behalf of God. If we were to exercise this gift well all of life would prosper including life for human beings. We could exhale more of a life bearing breath to be received by life to sustain the work that God had done out of love.

REFLECTION TIME

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. God took a gracious step and shared something of God with us. How can you best respond to this love of God?
2. Our existence is the extension and continued existence of God in the world. Have you ever felt or sensed God extending Godself through you? What have you done and what can you do to advance this presence?
3. What does it mean for you to be made in the Image of God?
4. How have you contributed to the disruption of God's work in the world. What helpful habits can you embrace going forward, even in addition to the steps you have already taken?
5. Are there any adjustments in your lifestyle that could enable sustainable living together with creation?

GROUP REFLECTION

1. What are some of the most unhelpful understandings of what it means to be human?
2. Why is it difficult for human beings to uphold the Image of God in them?
3. Human beings like to think that they are the best thing to be created by God. What has this notion resulted into as you look at life today? What things can human beings do differently?
4. Our discipleship is not of self-advancing in as much as corporate if the notion of Blessed to be a Blessing is to be properly upheld. In what ways are we challenged in this by Scripture?
5. How can we best exercise our sense of responsibility within creation? What are the best practices you can think of from what others have done? How can we as a community at Welties do this?
6. God chose to use the existing things to create other things out of. How can God use people, especially the Body of Christ to be used by God to create new life?