

Ps 19:1,2
Ps 33:1,2
Ps 8:1,2,3,4,5
Ps 145:3,4
Hy 72:3,4,5
Genesis 1:24-31
Genesis 3:1-9
Ephesians 4:29-5:2; 5:22-33
Lord's Day 3

Yarrow, May 12, 2011

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The gospel of Lord's Day 1 is so gloriously rich: I belong, with body and soul, in life and death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. That is: all things in my life come from the hand of my heavenly Father, and are pitched to my good. Very comforting indeed.

Is it really? We have persons in our midst who struggle with a strained marriage. We have persons in our midst who are lonely, would love to be married. We have persons in our midst who have hard feelings against their parents. The question screams at us: How do you, in the brokenness and crud of daily life, *how do you* make the most of the comfort of Lord's Day 1?! It seems so remote, so theoretical....

According to Lord's Day 1.2, the recipe for making the most of this comforting gospel in the crunch of daily living includes that we need to come to grips with our Sins & Misery. Yet Sin & Misery isn't theory either; as we so painfully experience in the crunch of daily living, sin makes us so miserable. The law (as we confess in Lord's Day 2) teaches us how to live in relation to God and neighbour alike, but obey that law, love God and neighbour with all our heart and soul and mind we can't. That's why we experience marriage strain, experience loneliness, experience pain in our relations with others. *It's why we need comfort!*

It raises that urgent question: *how come* I can't keep God's law?? Why is it that I keep stubbing my toe in the relationships of life?? Why am I always a failure?? That's the subject of Lord's Day 3: did God create me a dud?? In other words: does He do shoddy work? The question is important, if only because I look forward to being recreated in Christ's image – perfectly so, I believe, on the last day. *Will that be shoddy work too?*

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

OUR GOD DOES PERFECT WORK.

1. What God made,
2. What we became,
3. What we become.

1. What God made

Genesis 1 relates how the Lord God created this world. In the fourth commandment God Himself explains the events of Genesis 1 like this: "in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exodus 20:11). There was, says God, no process of millions of years involving much trial and error to get each creature just right (and that would include getting the human

race right), but a sharp “Let there be,” and “there was”. Ps 33: “He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.” Genesis 1, in other words, is revelation of who God is; He’s mighty to accomplish what He intends to do, and He gets it right the first time. So God could say at the end of the chapter: “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (vs 31). That is why David could exalt in Ps 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands” (vs 1). And Paul can remind the Romans that “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities –His eternal power and divine nature– have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (1:20). What a God this is!!

It is the human race in particular that reflects so wonderfully this glorious identity of God. After God had fashioned the animals of the field on the fifth day, God determined within Himself to “make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1:26). God carried out precisely what He said He’d do; “so God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (1:27).

What, congregation, does it mean that God created man “in His image”? The phrase “image of God” does *not* mean that man looks like God, as if we have a nose where He has a nose, we have arms like His arms, we have ten toes distributed equally between two feet as He has ten toes distributed equally between two feet. Rather, the term ‘image of God’ describes the notion that we *reflect God’s inner characteristics*. The animals He created, the plants He fashioned, the rivers and rocks and everything else, should experience a sense of what God is like –how?– by savouring how the human race acts. Specifically, it’s through the way in which mankind would *look after* God’s world that the rest of His creation gets a sense of what God is like. Notice how God worded His intent to create man in Genesis 1:26; He speaks of making man “in His image” and immediately adds that this special creature is to “rule over” the creatures He had earlier made. The point here is that man’s *manner of ruling* is to reflect how God would rule over His world. “Image of God” is not a question of looks, but a question of *action*; we were created to act the way God acts. Specifically, God created the human race to care for His world *in the way He Himself would care for His world*.

That, we need to understand, is a gloriously high calling!! *Image God*: fancy that!! God, if I may say it this way, would not ‘show His face’ on earth, and so fashioned mankind to represent Him. No wonder David breaks out in jubilation and praise! He exalts in Ps 8 about the greatness of God as revealed in the heavens He created, and contrasts that infinite majesty with the finiteness of mankind. You see it in front of your eyes: six foot David craning his neck skyward to behold the stars God fashioned – and he feels so puny, so limited.... Then to recall that *that puny creature man* has been made “ruler” over all God made, “all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea” are under his feet – and it just fills David with awe: “what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” He marvels at the privilege of the high calling: “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings” – and the Hebrew actually says that God made man a little lower than God Himself! On a scale of 1 to 10, with God at 10, man has received a place as 9! To image God through the way he rules over God’s world: what a privilege indeed!!

Just how does one go about imaging God through ruling?? It’s straight forward, actually. God Himself does not rule over His creatures with cruelty or with selfishness, but has a heart for the creatures He made. Ps 145: “the LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts us all who are bowed down. They eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and loving toward all he has made” (vss13ff). Notice

how the psalmist draws attention to such characteristics of God as His faithfulness and His love and His righteousness. That's the point of what imaging God is all about: as God is faithful to the rabbits of the field and loving to the ducks of the air and righteous in His care for the salmon, so people are to be faithful to the rabbits and loving to the ducks and righteous to the salmon. That's why the Catechism speaks about "true righteousness and holiness." That list of divine characteristics is, of course, much longer; as God is kind so man is to be kind, as good is good so man is to be good, as God is generous so man is to be generous, etc, etc. And it's the creatures of the world God placed under our feet that are to experience from man's behaviour what God is like.

This has, we understand, distinct implications for what God intended for His world. Was it God's intent in Genesis 1 that mankind pollute God's world? Was it His intent that fish and insects and birds and animals *suffer* because of the way men and women rule over God's world?? We realize: that was definitely not God's intent! Here we're confronted with the bitter effects of the fall into sin.... Because of that fall, we're not imaging God as we ought, and how creation suffers because of it.... But I'm getting ahead of myself; there's another aspect to imaging God that needs our attention first.

It's this. Genesis 1 tells us that God made man in His image, and adds: "male and female He created them" (vs 27). Why two genders? More, why are the two genders mentioned in the context of imaging God?

The answer is this. The human race is to image to all creation how the Lord cares for His world. But God's care is not limited to the cattle of the field and the fish of the sea and the birds of the air; His care includes the human race itself. In fact, with the human race the Lord God created a bond of love that He did not establish with robins and racoons, and that's His covenant of grace. God would be *Father* for Adam in a way He was not Father for Adam's horse (cf Luke 3:38). This relation of love God established with Adam involved interaction between God and man so that God would speak with Adam and Adam could talk with God. It was the good pleasure of God that the chemistry of this relationship be imaged on earth too – for the chemistry of this relationship gets to the heart of what God is like. That is why God declared that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). None of the animals God had earlier created, not even a dog, could relate to the man the way Adam could relate to God and the way God related to Adam. So God made a helper suitable for him, and did so not by tweaking a gorilla into a girl, nor by collecting new dust from the ground to make a brand new creature called woman, but by taking a rib from the man. This new creature God fashioned was not identical to the man but was a different gender, different as man is different than God, and yet the same, as man is able to image God. God fashioned a second gender, the female, so that Adam could relate to her *as he could relate to God in the covenant*.

There you have the primary purpose for marriage. God created the holy married state so that in the chemistry of the husband/wife relationship people would image the relation between God and humanity. God did not create marriage to take away loneliness, for Scripture nowhere says Adam was lonely; that he was "alone" is a different thing than that he was lonely! God created marriage so that mankind, male and female, can image God well, can reflect well to the rest of creation what God is like.

That is why same-gender marriage is wrong. The almighty did not create a second God with whom to relate, a second God mandated to rule over God's world on behalf of the Almighty. Instead He created a creature *different* from Himself, and yet one so gifted that He could communicate with God, could relate to Him. Similarly, the Lord God did not create a second male with whom Adam could relate, but He created a female, a creature *different* from the male and yet of the same species. Again, at the heart of marriage is not sexual relations, but is instead the whole range of interaction that typifies God's covenant with man. It is care and response to care, it is kindness and kindness returned, it is love and

self-emptying for the sake of the other, etc. The way in which Adam and Eve interacted together illustrated for the rest of creation the marvels of God interacting with mankind, that delightful covenant of love.

The obvious implication is: let young men pursue marriage. Yet before they pursue marriage, let young men make it their business to know God well so that they image God well. In the words of Lord's Day 3: it's for us to "know God his Creator" rightly, "heartily love Him." Then seek a girl of the same spiritual stature, one who also rightly knows God her Creator and loves Him heartily. In the chemistry of such a God-centred relationship, a couple images what God is like. Such chemistry, like the heavens David sang about in Ps 19, reflects the glory of God. In God's own words, "Behold, it is very good."

Till things went sideways. That's our second point:

2. What we became.

What God had so gloriously made, the devil so wickedly destroyed. Though created to reflect what God was like, the human race (in Adam and Eve) broke the covenant with God and joined Satan. As a result we by nature now image what Satan is like. As Jesus said to the Jews of His day, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (John 8:44). Or in Paul's words to the Ephesians who embraced the gospel, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of ... the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:1f). Though the instruction to image God to all creation remains, the ability to do that imaging is gone, lost. That's the tragedy of the fall into sin. It's Question & Answer 7: "man's depraved nature" comes from "the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise." "There our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin." Or, as Question & Answer 8 has it, "we are so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil." We simply cannot image correctly who God is. That's why creation suffers and groans. It's not just the earthquakes and tsunamis and tornadoes and floods that ravage nature in a way that did not happen in Paradise, but it is specifically man's selfishness and his failure to care for nature the way God does that leads to so much suffering for our fellow creatures. This is a bitter fruit of our fall into sin, and requires mankind's repentance. Only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit can Canadians image God's perfect care for nature. And that is why Canada so desperately needs the gospel.

But let me try to bring the material closer to home. We all live in families and in relationships. I mentioned before that God created marriage so that husband and wife might image well what God's relation with mankind was like. But follow then, brothers and sisters, how the fall into sin came about.

God had created the man first, and then the woman to be his helper. The implication is that the man was the head, the leader, in that relation, even as the Lord God is the head, the leader, in the covenant with man (cf 1 Corinthians 11:3). The serpent, crafty creature, determined to trip up the human race. How he sought to do it? He approached the woman, not the man, the leader. Why the woman? As man is the *second* in the relation between God and man (so that the initiative and the leadership in the relation is always God's), so the woman is the *second* in the relation between man and woman – so that the initiative and leadership in the relation comes from the man. But Satan addresses the woman, and Eve did not turn to her husband for his input and leadership; she (says Genesis 3:6) made a decision on the basis of Satan's words, "took" from the fruit God had forbidden "and ate it." Adam, meanwhile, was "with her", yet did not reprimand her but let her follow her head..., and when she offered him fruit he too "ate it". What we have? Here is a *role reversal* of the man and the woman, where the woman took the initiative and the man followed.

That action did not reflect what God was like. Adam should not have acquiesced to his wife taking the initiative, but he should have taken leadership – as God does in His relation with man. He failed, and as a result of that failure God placed his curse on the man and the woman alike – yet not simply on the two as separate individuals, but rather on the two as married also and hence on the chemistry between the two. Notice what the Lord says in Genesis 3:16b. He is addressing the woman about the pain of childbearing, and then adds: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” The point of that curse is this: because of the role reversal as it happened in the fall into sin, the Lord will now plague the woman (and hence the man too) with an ongoing desire for that role reversal. The woman will want to dominate the man, but the man is commanded not to allow her to succeed (cf Genesis 4:7). He must, in other words, strain himself to be the leader of the two genders – even as the Lord God is and remains the leader in the relation between God and man.

Here you have the explanation for the battle of the genders as it characterizes so much of human history. In their relation together, man and woman are to image what God is like, specifically how He relates to the human race. But because of our fall we don't image God as ought; in fact, in our interpersonal relations, also in marriages, we experience so much frustration, so much brokenness, so much selfishness. Specifically in marriage, with the person closest to us, fallen humanity reflects to children and neighbours alike (to say nothing of to dogs and fish) that we are inclined to hate, to hate even that neighbour so close to us.... That sin gives so much misery in our land today.... Witness the divorce rate of our society, and how many children suffer so acutely because Dad and Mum do not image God in their relation together.... Talk about Sin & Misery....

And that's where we need comfort! And there is comfort; that's our third point:

3. What we become

We were created to image God, and we can't do it. In the midst of this misery, congregation, the Lord God in mercy sent His Son to earth, a man as human as you and me. Yet this man was not corrupted by the fall into sin – and that's to say that He imaged God perfectly in what He did. What creation saw in Jesus Christ? Creation saw in Jesus Christ a man *who emptied Himself to serve those around Him, including his enemies*. For He went to the cross to atone for the sins of the undeserving and the unworthy, even you and me. That self-emptying reflected beautifully what God was like! Think about it: did almighty God, sovereign and eternal Creator, *have* to establish a bond of love with mankind in Paradise?? That He would relate to creatures-made-of-dust was grace, was compassion, was mercy, was love! Jesus Christ reflected that grace, that compassion, that mercy, that love so delightfully in His sacrifice on the cross – He emptied Himself to save the lost – and the result is that we are reconciled to God, are made His children again, so that the relation-of-love God intended in the beginning is restored! More, in that relation of love we are *changed*, we are *made able again* to reflect what God is like! That's Lord's Day 1: Christ through His blood not only set us free from the power of the devil, but He also gives us His Holy Spirit so that today I'm made heartily willing and ready again to live for God – right in the midst of life's ongoing garbage! How delightful!

Scriptural evidence for that?? Consider first the word of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul tells the Christians of Corinth that they “are being transformed into [the Lord's] likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (vs 18). Notice the present-progressive tense: Christians “are being transformed.” It's ongoing action, happening day by day. Paul repeats the thought a chapter later as he writes about the suffering of this life: “though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (4:16). Again, to the Ephesians he writes that Christians have been taught “to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and

holiness" (4:24). This, brothers and sisters, is the renewing, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit – and the result is that we are able again to image what God is like. No, we don't do it perfectly; we understand that. That doesn't take away from the fact that believers definitely do reflect again (be it poorly, but reflect nevertheless) for nature's benefit what God is like! This is the confession of Lord's Day 3: we are so corrupt that we can't to any good and are inclined to all evil "unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." And regenerated the Christian is!!

That is why the apostle can add the instruction of Ephesians 4:25ff about how Christians are to avoid all falsehood and are to speak the truth, are to steer clear of any unwholesome talk and say only what builds up, are to get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger, and instead be kind and compassionate and "forgiving each other, *just as in Christ God forgave you.*" You notice the link: the Christian has attitudes as God has, reflects what God is like! Ephesians 5:1f: "be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." There it is: you can image God again, restored to that exalted position of 9 out of 10! What glorious privilege!

Then it's no surprise that the Paul ends this chapter with reference to Christian marriage, and tells husbands to "love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*" As eternal God in Paradise condescended to establish a bond of love with man-made-of-dust, and then cared for him perfectly, even after the fall sending His only Son to earth to atone for man's sin, so the husband is to empty himself for the good of his wife. Such service to his wife speaks volumes to children, to spouse, to neighbours and so many others of what God is like – and imaging God is your highest calling! Make no mistake: in the strength of the Lord you can do it!

And down the road?? On the day that Christ returns every stubborn remnant of sin and brokenness shall be taken away. Fancy that: perfectly renewed, so that we image God precisely! How nature shall rejoice when it savours from our behaviour exactly what God is like!!

Comfort in today's brokenness? Yes, there is! Nature groans in travail because of the abuse it experiences on account of man's selfishness. So many children suffer deeply for the same reason. But the child of God can live from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and so begin to reflect how the Lord God looks after his creation. More, the day is coming –soon– when we'll be perfected so that we can reign with Christ perfectly over all creation. What wonderful privilege!