

September 14 & 15, 2024

Lost in Translation | *To Bear*

Genesis 1:26-31

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We were created and God called us good. There are no tests to take. There is nothing to prove. Our response to our creation to bear the very image we were created in – the image of God. How do we bear God’s image in a way that response to God trust in us as image bearers?

As I mentioned last week, for our 25th anniversary, my wife and I spent some time in the Czech Republic – the city of Prague. Beautiful city. And right in the middle of what they call Old Town was a town square and some touristy stuff around it. But the highlight was a particular food stand. They sold ham by the kilo. Well as I told this story this past summer, they sold it by the gram, but the metric system is lost on me, so they were more than happy to sell by kilo. We worked it out though. Grams all around.

What was so surprising is that while I am a big all things pork fan, ham is my least favorite. I am not really that big of a fan of ham. However, these folks made ham unbelievably tasty. This is how they cooked it. I was so amazed that I tried to strike up a conversation with one of the cooks to find out what kind of pig breed it was.

So, there I am, knowing zero Czech, trying to communicate with a cook that doesn’t know English but we both knew the word ham. Once that was established, I thought we were getting somewhere. So, I began to ask what kind of ham it was. I start naming off pig breeds – well any that I knew... Is it a Duroc? He looked at me with a strange but kind expression and said, Prague ham. Well of course we are in Prague. So, undeterred I asked, Iberian? Again, he responded with Prague ham. Ok, something is really getting lost in translation here. But I really wanted to know what kind of ham this was, so I asked Berkshire? Oxford? Hampshire? Each time he kept saying Prague, Prague, Prague until he became quite annoyed and said, “Prague butcher, Prague ham”, and he walked

away from the annoying American. I may have single handedly set back US Czech relations by decades.

Something in his voice made me think that maybe he was right. Maybe it was Prague ham. So, I googled it – and yes there is such a thing as Prague ham. It has different, but similar names in other countries but there it was, staring me in the face. Prague ham. Sometimes what is right in front of us is just what it is. There is nothing more to it.

Last week we just scratched the surface of Genesis 1 while at the same time unpacking what does it mean that we are westerners looking through a window into the room of a pre-modern easterner’s culture and context. We looked at numbers as not being only quantitative but also pointing to something. This coming week our podcast will get rolling and you’ll be able to take a deeper dive into all of that. We also talked about a writing style that is used that we in our western world largely miss. It’s the use of chiasmic writing that places the emphasis on the middle of a particular text. Here is what the formula usually looks like.

So, we are going to look at a text we introduced briefly last week as an example but also this text is critical to understanding what God is doing in creation, especially as we explore our humanness in relationship with God.

Genesis 1:27

A B C

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,

C

in the image of God

B A

he created them; male and female he created them.

Last week we talked about the center of this text, being image and in particular God’s image. And this text is so clear, let’s rephrase this... this text is “Prague Ham” clear. It is exactly what it says it is. We can’t mess it up. Or can we? Well, as we will see later in the story folks mess it up all time. But we will get to that.

God creates humankind in God's image. That means you and me. That means all of us. But most of the time we have come to believe that we are not worthy of God's image, so we try to prove it. We tell ourselves that there is no way we could have been made in God's image. But let's stop and ask the question, "What is God's image?" How does the story up this point, reveal to us about God's image. Again, we are going to connect to a number and this a number 3. Oddly Trinitarian... but maybe not so odd.

To start God's image is one of Creator:

¹*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth... Genesis 1:1*

God's image is also one of Spirit:

²*but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water... Genesis 1:2*

And God's image is Word:

³*Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. Genesis 1:3*

That's what we have – that is God's image. Creator, Spirit, Word. And we are created in that image, but how do we live into this image of Creator, Spirit, Word? How do we bear this image well in the world? In high school, when I would go hang out with my friends, my dad would say these words to me as I walked out the door "Remember who you are. You are a Dean." It was my dad's not so subtle way of saying, "Carry our name well. What do you reflects on all of us."

But let's stop for a moment here. When we read about being created in the image of God, we have to sit with the reality that we did nothing to deserve being created in the image of God. That is a gift that God gives freely. We didn't earn it. We didn't have to pass a test for it. We didn't behave in a certain way in order to be created in God's image. This is just the way God wants it to be, and it is a big deal. To be created in the image of the God of the universe? That's how special you are. That is how special God thinks we all are. The call for us then is to use this gift – like "Prague Ham" – that sitting in this text right in plain sight.

And yes, the call then is live into this image. It's like my dad reminding us all – "Remember who you are." And so, we start with questions based on what we know from Genesis 1 about God's image. First, God is image is one of creator. We are called to be creators. However, what are you desiring to create? As an image bearer of God what are you trying to create? At the end of each day can you say what you created was good? At the end of each day can you look back and say that way you created brought more life, more promise, more hope into the world? Because there are a lot people who have been created in the image of God who are actively seeking to create things that distract, destroy and tear down. What kind of creator are you?

And then do you know that the Spirit of God is in you, hovering there to guide you, you are not alone. Jesus even tells us in the gospel of John "²⁶ *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. John 14:26*" because the next part of the image of God is Word. At some point in the creative process, you will speak. And depending on what you are trying to create and how deeply you listen to the Holy Spirit your words are either going to leave others in darkness or are they going to bring light. The very first spoken word in this creation poem while there was darkness everywhere is "Let there be light."

Jesus in the gospel of Matthew puts it this way.

¹⁷ *Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"* ¹⁸ *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?"* ¹⁹ *Show me the coin used for the tax."* *And they brought him a denarius.* ²⁰ *Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?"* ²¹ *They answered, "The emperor's."* *Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."* ²² *When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. Matthew 22:17-22 NRS*

They were amazed as they realized maybe for the first time that they, just like a coin stamped with an

image, were stamped with the image of God. Give to God, you. Your creativity, your spirit, even your words because you are stamped with God's image. Give it back. Give it back through living into who you were created to be. What do we call behavior or words that come from a destructive place, a place that is not guided by the holy spirit and leads us to say destructive words? We call all of that ugly. It's an ugly image. That's why that kind of behavior gets the ugly label. When that happens, we've lost the plot, things get lost in translation.

But when we trust the story, You and I are stamped with God's image from the very beginning. We are creative beings – designed to create goodness, guided by the Holy Spirit so that the very words we speak bring light to all of those around us.