

Humanity – in God’s Image

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on September 12th, 2021 – Season of Creation: Humanity Sunday)

I don’t know about you but I found myself absolutely fascinated and inspired by what I saw at the Para Olympics. The basketball was exiting and frenetic, the table tennis players were amazing. The way athletes encouraged each other was extraordinary, I found myself sobbing often. Their delight at just competing was humbling. I watched one young swimmer with autism, in his interview say he was filled with gratitude, gratitude to his family, his coaches, his team, the sport, the organisers of the game, to everyone – it was beautiful seeing his delight. Guts and determination have been on display. There is absolute triumph against the odds. The perseverance of the athletes is obvious to all.

These games celebrate diversity, they reveal acceptance of all, they inspire us with amazing feats of endurance, their ingenuity is truly amazing. I feel like we see the very best of humanity on display.

There is one quote from Kurt Fearnley, a previous para olympian that has stuck with me. I can’t remember it exactly but he said something like – people keep saying look past the disability, but I want to say don’t look past the disability but rather look full on into one’s complexity. I keep thinking about this – what would it mean if we lived this, for the way. In which we engage with people of all abilities.

Humanity is created in God’s image says the book of Genesis.

What do you see in our humanity? I think we have sometimes seen the very best, truly seen God’s image in people. The extraordinary acts of compassion on the sports field, in war zones, in disasters, in neighbourhoods. However, we need to acknowledge our frailty and that we have seen some truly awful acts committed by humans – war crimes - especially given it is twenty years since 9/11, abuse, allowing people to go hungry or without shelter, destruction of the environment around us, and I am sure you can add to the list.

Genesis reminds us that humanity is created in God’s image. Knitted in our mother’s womb says the Psalmist. Every hair on our head is counted by God, says another Psalm.

Humanity is given the task of naming all of creation – we have a special link with everything else. Naming something gives us some kind of relationship with it, perhaps even leads us into a caring relationship with it, as that which we have named becomes subject rather than just an object.

I wonder in what sense we are made in God’s image. Is it our ability to be creative, to love, to co-exist with difference? Is it self-giving, is it the desire to be compassionate, to be relational – an ability to give and receive love? Is it a desire to look after/tend others or a capacity to reason, or a capacity for wisdom? If God is a tri – unity then by implication we too should be able to co-exist with difference, to be relational, to be welcoming and open.

Psalm 8 reminds us that we are to care for the rest of creation but I suspect a misreading of it, has led to us dominating and exploiting the rest of creation rather than tending it. It says that we are made a little lower than God and perhaps we sometimes

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think we are better than the rest of creation. The word dominion has often been interpreted I think as dominate rather than tend.

We have mucked it up, we have forgotten in whose image we were made.

God sent Jesus to share in our humanity and to show us again how we should live. He knows and shares both our good attributes, our frailty, our joys and our sorrows. From the very beginning of his ministry he sets out his agenda for humanity. Luke 4 tells us that Jesus has come to :

- Bring good news to the poor
- Proclaim release to the captives
- Recovery of sight to the blind
- To let the oppressed go free
- Proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour

In his life we see and hear more of this agenda. The way he shared hope, acceptance and compassion with those who are poor or on the fringes of society. He healed and fed people. He welcomed outsiders – women, children, tax collectors, prostitutes. He took some rough and ready fishermen under his wing. His teaching reflected his living – love God and your neighbour, care for your enemy. He loved people enough to challenge them, to set boundaries for them. This is a picture of true humanity, a picture of being made in the image of God.

It wouldn’t hurt for us to adopt His agenda.

Paul sets out the agenda again, imploring us to be of the same mind as Jesus – have the same love, live in unity with one another, acting with humility and looking out for each other.

Our own mission statement says we celebrate the God-given diversity of cultures. We welcome all to join us in the journey of faith, whatever your race, religion, capability, gender or sexuality. A vision of the people of God made in the image of God.

At the very beginning, the picture of creation was one of beauty, diversity, unity, co-operation and joy. It got mucked up along the way, but Jesus in his life and teaching reminded us of what life could be like.

Leunig sums it up when he says - Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

So, let’s reclaim our true humanity. Let’s live without fear. Let’s stop all that dehumanises another. Let’s celebrate all people, all creation. Let’s make sure we care tenderly for the rest of creation with compassion. Let’s free people from all that binds or suffocates them. Let’s embrace our diversity and celebrate it. Let’s live out our full humanity. Together we are imago dei, together we are the image, the likeness of an ever-creating, ever-loving, ever-present God. Amen.