

Is God Man?

Questions of Faith: Part 5 “Is God Man?”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – February 27, 2022

8th Sunday After Epiphany

Readings: Genesis 1:26-28; Hosea 11:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:13-16; John 4:23-26

Reflection: Psalm 93

Greeting: The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps broke open. And the clouds drop down the dew. Praise the Lord! (*Proverbs 3*)

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you this day that we may seek your wisdom. We know that all knowledge begins with you. Help us to walk in your ways and to follow the example set for us in Jesus Christ our redeemer. Bring us into your light so that we may live in your great love. Renew our spirit so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Strengthen our faith and our hope in your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 93

*The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD! Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.
(Psalm 93 NRSV*)*

We read the words of Psalm 93 and hear of God’s majesty. That God is the one who has created all. That everything is God’s dominion. What images do you have when you think about God’s strength? What comes to mind when you think about God’s power? Does it comfort you to know that all of that majesty and power is there for you? How do you share God’s glory and grace with others? What does it mean to you to seek God’s salvation?

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, you have watched over us all the days of our lives. Be with us now as we come to you with our worries and questions. Help us to find wisdom through your steadfast love. Help us remember that you are so much more than we can imagine. We thank you that your ear is always turned towards us so that we may come to you with the joys and troubles in our hearts. We raise our prayers to you because of your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek your grace and love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Genesis chapter 1 verses 26 through 28.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Hosea chapter 11 verses 9 through 11.

I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD. (Hosea 11:9-11 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from 1 Timothy chapter 6 verses 13 through 16.

In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13-16 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from John chapter 4 verses 23 through 26.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." (John 4:23-26 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, this is a question that I've had more often than I imagined I would. I've had this talked about by other clergy even, so I figured I would address it. I remember once that there was a question about if language about God could use both male and female terms. I didn't think much about it at the time. But then someone stood up and basically said "God has to be one or the other, you can't be both male and female. That's just not right." But that statement

missed a rather big point about God. I think some of the problems we run into are barriers set by the limitation of language. We have “he” or “she” as terms to refer to people and English lacks a specific non-gendered term. And the problem with all of our gendered language is that it fails us when we attempt to describe someone as big as God. And this can cause problems in the way that we understand God. So, I picked just a selection of readings today to guide us through this discussion. We opened with Genesis chapter one. And that we have that God say, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness... So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” The first thing to acknowledge here is that this is high poetry. It is some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible. The point for us today though is that God has created all of humankind in God's image, which means that both male and female are the image of God. That humankind carries God's spiritual image imprinted upon them. This raises some questions for us here. How would we explain God's physical body? Does God have a physical body? Is God limited by our material and physical existence? Or is God beyond those measures?

The prophet Hosea helps us as we look at those questions. Because God is deciding he will not let his anger be executed against the people. “For I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst.” Now, I chose this one because of the fact that this is a very plain statement that reminds us that God isn't mortal. God isn't human because humans are mortal creatures. Humankind is made in a divine image but mortal all the same. And that's not God. If God's not mortal like us, then God's going to be beyond most of the physical descriptions that we understand. And we're again limited by language. This is further emphasized when we look at First Timothy. Here we find the words “It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.” Now, this again is rather poetic language, but the idea here is one that's repeated in other places in the Bible. We are presented with the idea that no one has seen God and that God can be in places unreachable and unfathomable by man. And this is helped along by our gospel reading. The short reading we have here is describing God. We have Jesus saying that “God is spirit.” In this statement, Jesus places God beyond our usual human limitations. This is another reminder of the way that God is more than our physical existence. We hear other references like this, that God is love, that God is light, that God is not a mortal. In short, God is not man. We hear it throughout when God has described that it's always so much bigger and further beyond anything that we can fully describe. The thing that's pointed out over and over again is that our human limitations limit how much we can understand of God, because we aren't God. Because God is so much more than our senses can comprehend.

This means that God is well beyond our simple human categorizations. God is not bound by human gender because God has no need of the gender. Just as God would not have a need for human height or even human form. God is God. Now, God is referred to often as he throughout the Bible. What are we to make of that? An easy explanation is that the Bible is written from a patriarchal viewpoint. I'm not saying that to detract from it, to accuse it in any

way. But it's just the simple truth. In a male dominated society are you going to refer to God as he or she? Because if you have to pick one, you're going to pick the one that matches the people in charge. People often depict God and Christ as reflected by their own image. We see many famous paintings of Christ that depict Christ as looking, not like the historical Christ would have looked, but looking like the society the artist came from. As one of my mentors once said, "you get a lot of paintings of German Jesus." Why? I think it is because we like to make the connection to Christ looking like we do because then he feels less foreign and much closer. And we do the same thing to God by giving God human terms. We talk about God's mighty arm, but Does God really have an arm that reaches out to do things? If God is both visible and invisible, how do you describe God unless you use relatable terms? How can you describe the indescribable?

My point in all this is that when the question comes up of "Is God man?" we have to remember that God is God. Is God a male? No, because God isn't human. What would the immortal creator of everything need a gender for? It's our human understanding that causes us to need to use those terms. Thinking of God's footstool or God's throne are images that we understand and can make sense of. But it doesn't mean that God is an old man with white hair and a white beard sitting on a throne. Could God choose to look that way? Sure. Would God be limited to only that look? No. But it's okay to have that image of God if we need to picture God. Because we've been doing it since the very first time that we imagined what God would look like. Scripture tells us that no one has truly seen God, so we don't have a physical description. We can imagine what God looks like. We can imagine what Christ looks like. Is your picture of Jesus like that of the European painters? That's okay. Is your idea of God as an old man dressed in white with a long beard? If that's how you can think of God to be able to focus on God and relate to God, that is perfectly fine. But we also have to remember that God is well beyond our categorizations and God is well beyond our limitations. Because in the end, God is God. Almighty, all powerful, all knowing, beyond all things. The uncreated creator of all. Just don't confuse your personal image of God with who God truly is. Don't try to limit the way others view God because of the image you need. We may be created in God's image, but we are a shadow of that glory and greatness. We are but a hint of the full magnitude of that holiness. But God can be all things for all people, no matter what words we use to feel closer to God. And God is always there for us to be that all in all. God's goodness and love are well beyond all that we could hope for. So that God, in all his glory, is all we need. "Is God Man?" No, because God is oh so much more. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. Help us to live a life by your wisdom, that we may love and forgive through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Questions of Faith

In this series, Pastor Cameron will be answering questions that have been asked of him at various times. If you have a question you'd like him to address as part of this series, just let him know.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

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