

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 15 Oct 2023
Sermon Title : Loving Our Differences
Speaker : Rev Eddie Ho
Text : Romans 12:4-5

INTRODUCTION

This week's topic for our "Loving Our ..." sermon series is on "Loving Our Differences". This topic is very broad yet very apt for today's very polarizing world, whether in politics, view or opinions, whether it is on religion or the Middle East situation. Each has his or her own unbending and strong opinion, and sometimes we refuse to listen to other people who have contrasting opinions from us.

This passage in Romans 12:3-5 and other passages in the New Testament (eg. 1 Corinthians 12) also talk about one body, many members, and almost all the letters in the New Testament were written to address diversity and differences in the church. God is supremely concerned with unity within the church. For this sermon however, we will approach it from the angle of God's original design of mankind, which applies to not just the church, but all human beings regardless of race, language or religion.

God created humanity in His own image

²⁶ "Let us make **man** in our image, after our likeness..." ²⁷ So God created **man** in his own image.. (Genesis 1:26a, 27a)

The original Hebrew word for **man** here is "**ha-adam**" which means 'The Adam', or 'mankind' or 'humanity'. This is God's most fundamental and original design for all human beings. In the beginning God created humanity in His own image.

Why God created us in His own image and what it means to be created in the image of God

A theologian likened being made in the image of God to being an angled mirror. We are made to be an angled mirror to reflect God to the world, so that everything on earth in His creation can see God through us, for after God created mankind, He blessed and gave them a vocation:

"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill the Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of the Earth."
(Genesis 1:28, MSG)

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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- We have a divine duty to flourish God's Creation. God created and placed us in the world to take care of His Creation on His behalf. While we take care of Creation, Creation can see God through us. Being made in the image of God is not literal. God did not make us to look like Him physically. Being made in the image of God is a vocation. We are supposed to point Creation to God. This is God's original design for humanity right from the start.
- We are the bearer of God's image on Earth. When the world look at us they are supposed to see God. We are supposed to reflect, reveal and represent God to the world. This is the existential purpose of human beings. Yet no one single person can be the full image of God because God is infinitely greater than any one of us can imagine. (Job 26:14)
- We were made to reflect God's glory, a greatness to the world. But God is so great that no one can fully reflect His greatness. God is also infinitely wiser than all of us combined. (1 Corinthians 1:25) God is infinitely more glorious than all of our accomplishments combined. (Psalms 113:4-6)

Why did God make us one body many members? (v.4a)

Like the pixels of a painting, the picture gets clearer when the pixels come together. The more we love each other and work together, the clearer the image of God will be to the world. If anyone thinks that that he can be a solo Christian without the body, not only does he not know the heart of God, he also does not understand the fundamental purpose of being human. As individuals, we cannot reflect the full image of God. He made humanity as a collective to be bearer of His Image in the world, to reflect, to represent, to reveal God to the world.

God made us to be very different from each other

Our individual full potential is not found when we are isolated or left alone. Our individual identity is found, discovered and experienced only in relationship to the body. We are not fully who we are created to be until we use our God-given gifts to serve each other in the body. This is God's original design. The whole of humanity is made in the image of God but as individuals we are made to be different to complement each other, to bring out our God-given gifts in each other and together, collectively, we are the bearer of God's image.

Individually members one of another (v.5b)

When CS Lewis' close friend Charles Williams died, he was grief-stricken. He realized that:

“In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out.” (Now that A is dead, I shall never again see C's reaction to A's joke. I thought I would have more of C. On the contrary, I have less of C.)

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“We possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases.”
- C S Lewis

Jesus Christ the 2nd Adam

- After The Fall of humanity in Genesis 3, and from Genesis 4 onwards, the world did not see a unified, single image of God ever again, but many images of self-serving men. Images of greed and dishonesty, injustice and oppression. This is not the image of God and so from Genesis 5 onwards, God commenced on a mission to recover and to redeem the beautiful image of God. This redemptive mission built up throughout the Old Testament and climaxed at the arrival of the second Adam which is called The Christ.
- This second Adam called The Christ lived a sinless life. He chose to live the total opposite of the fallen humanity. He suffered and died on the cross and took our sins away; by His blood He created a new being. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

What was God thinking when He put a motley crew of people together on Earth?

As human beings we are supposed to work together to bring out the full potential in each other but the whole humanity failed. After Jesus came, this working principle of the image of God remains the same, as the Church. When we love each other, we reflect that. Christ is the head of this new humanity and we will bring out in each other what God wants us to be, being made different.

Dealing with our differences

We can bring out the best and the worst in each other, so how do we deal with our differences?

- Paul says to everyone, “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think”. (Romans 12:3) You are not the saviour of the world. Jesus is. When you disagree with someone, instead of jumping in to prove the person wrong, why not first search your heart. What is the attitude that you are carrying? Is your attitude “I’m right you’re wrong that’s why I’m questioning you” or should it be “I believe I’m right, I just want to know why you think you are right. Come let’s talk.” Choose a more constructive attitude.
- Romans 12:3 reminds us to “think with sober judgment”. Sober judgment can refer to discernment - discernment between truth and opinion. The subsequent chapter, Romans 13, talks about authorities that God has allowed or ordained in the world. God is asking you to have faith in Him when He ordains authorities in this world. While you ask God for the ability to discern between opinion and truth, do not act alone. Consult the larger body of Christ for collective wisdom. Not everything on this side of heaven will reach full consensus but subject yourself to collective wisdom.

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- “There are many doctrines of a less essential nature. ...In these, we may think and let think; we may *agree to disagree*.” – John Wesley

In other words, “in essentials choose unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

CONCLUSION

There are many things that is not really essential, and in these things, we should think and let think - let people have the benefit of the doubt. Agree to disagree. If it is a matter of biblical truth, do not bend or compromise your individual or corporate integrity. But if it is a matter of opinion, choose to be gracious. If we love one another especially because of our differences, we will be the true angled mirror the world will see. The world will see God through us and that is why if we love one another the world will know that we are His disciples. Therefore, let us together and collectively, reflect, represent and reveal God to the world.

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read Romans 12:4-5 slowly

Think of your life as a child of God now. How have you been reflecting God's image to the world?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. How has knowing “being made in God’s image is a vocation” impacted you?
- 3b. (i) How can we as “one body, many members” in our church, collectively, reflect a more accurate image of God to the world?
- (ii) What are some challenges our church will experience in 3b(i) above?
4. As individuals, God made us to be different to complement each other.
- a. How is the above true in your home, Life Group, ministry or church?
- b. (i) How is the above not true in your home, Life Group, ministry or church?
- (ii) What is one thing you can do in the situation in 4b(i) above to help bring out the best in each other in your home, Life Group, ministry or church?
5. When dealing with differences, why is it important to remember this quotation, “In essentials choose unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity,”?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

6. Share your personal testimony on how you have been able to see and know God through someone who reflected Him to you.

OR

Give thanks to God for the gifts He has given you so you can complement another person.

7. As a group, seek the Holy Spirit in the leading of your daily lives as you strive to be bearer of God's image, so that together and collectively, you may reflect God to the world, represent God in the world and reveal God to the world.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. This Is Amazing Grace – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPQKj2Zptr0>
2. For You Alone – Don Harris <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAKGa9Xpu6M>
3. One Voice – Hosanna! Music https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au_Znfrjab4

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