

I am in God's image and likeness

Series: I am...
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Identity,
Genesis 1: 26-28

So you have probably also seen videos online of young ones of different species being raised by parents of another species. For example, a fox being raised by a dog. It ends up thinking and living its life like a dog. Guinea fowls being raised by chickens grow up thinking the chicken hen is their mom and the live like chickens. Dogs being raised by humans and thinking they are kids. A Mowgli and Tarzan being raised by wild animals and thinking they are wild.

There is a sad story of a girl who was found in 2009 when she was 5 years old. Natasha Mikhailova was Russian, mistreated by her parents she was raised like one of the animals in the house. By age 5 she thought she was one of the animals. She would go to the door and bark like her dogs, when introduced to people she would jump on them just like one these, hiss at them or try to play fetch. Lapped up food like a cat and drank water like her dogs. And walked around on all fours.

Now that is such a sad story that I cannot wait to the end to tell you that she was rescued. I tried searching for new information on her but could not find and maybe that is a good idea because all 15-year-old needs is a normal life. Unfortunately, up until the age of 5, Natalia did not realise that her dogs and cats answered to her. Now it's a great story of survival but she should not have been fighting for survival, to begin with.

See being raised by a different species, does not make you that species but you sure would act as it. A Guinea fowl raised by chickens is still a guinea fowl. It just does not know its true identity. Its living out of false identity. It has the wrong finishing to the statement, "I Am..."

This is not uncommon for people to completely not know who they are. And when people are unaware of who they are? They let the environment dictate who they act as.

That story plays itself out every day in our lives every single day. As a man or a woman thinks, so they are. If I asked you the question, "Who are you?", your answer to that question determines how you live your life. If asked to complete the statement, 'I am...', the adjectives and descriptors you come up with greatly influence; how you do business, how you treat your employees, how you are as an employee, who you are as a spouse or a partner, who you are a son or a daughter.

So, humour me for a moment, hold right now in your mind the answers that came to your mind to the question, “Who are you?” Take note of the descriptors you are using to finish the statement, “I am...”

That is what we will be talking about. Let’s pray

Some of you started with your gender. Some of you started with your sexuality, some of you started with your race while some started with your nationality. Am I black or white? Am I Luo or Kalenjin, I’m I Kenyan. Am I male? But those are very narrow and simply secondary descriptions of who we are.

Your nationality tells you where you’re a citizen of, but nothing about who you are. Your genetics and race can tell you who and where you are from but they cannot answer the question who are you? If I say I am black, this is very significant and important. But I am one in around 3 billion people. It still does not tell me who I am. Your sexuality, tells you who you love but not who you are. Your jobs and careers tell you the opportunities you got to make a living but not who you are. And do not get me wrong. These are hugely important issues, but they are secondary. Sadly, these are the first things on our list of descriptors for who we are.

And sadly, politics, the movies, economists, religion, everybody wants to have a say on describing your identity. They wanna tell you who you are. And if we do not know who we are? We will be Mowgli. We will be a human cub. We will pick from the rest of the world how to act or speak or do business. We will be blown by whatever political and philosophical wind that blows. We will wear masks every day to fit into whichever crowd surrounds in that season of life only to be lonely and depressed in the evenings staring at our emptiness.

Do you know what is beautiful about finally knowing who you are? Freedom, peace. Living fully alive and unapologetically alive. You get to know when to say no and when to say yes and to what. You get to know that you have a seat at God’s table and it is not for someone to give it to you.

I think it’s like how as people get old they grow more comfortable in their skin. They become more accepting of themselves. They stop trying to please the world and just live. Now, this is sometimes good and sometimes bad. But finally, as people grow older and accept themselves and stop trying to wear masks they actually begin to live, sadly its often when they have very little time.

My grandmother, if she did not like you, she did not. If she was done being at someplace she was done. When she visited this church she was not shaken about not being able to communicate. She just smiled and kept owning me as she announced that I am her grandson and she didn’t care if any of y’all understood. She was living her life.

My grandmother told me some of the most politically incorrect things I have heard in this world. She was not trying to please me. She was just bringing herself. Which included all the love she had for me.

When we would visit she would insist on kissing us on the face And that was becoming uncomfortable because she had lost teeth. She would dance herself out and it looked crazy but she did not care. Nothing could contain her joy and love. She had gotten to better accept herself.

What if, people actually know who they really are earlier than in their old age? Or even in their old age not just to accept who society said they were but to fully embrace who God says they are?

The only way we understand what anything is is by going back to its origins. I think that is why DNA analysis has become a huge thing in the last decade. I think that is why there has been a growing movement of investigating the histories of our nations. Because the source documents tell us who we are. So if they were cooked, we live out a cooked identity.

We've got that part right but sadly people often do it for only the secondary things. Genetics, nationhood, biology etc.

I want us to go back to our beginnings.

Genesis 1: 2, 26-28

In the beginning, God created everything: the heavens above and the earth below.

Now let Us conceive a new creation—humanity—made in Our image, fashioned according to Our likeness. And let Us grant them authority over all the earth—the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, the domesticated animals and the small creeping creatures on the earth.

So God did just that. He created humanity in His image, created them male and female. Then God blessed them and gave them this directive: “Be fruitful and multiply. Populate the earth. I make you trustees of My estate, so care for My creation and rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that roams across the earth.”

The story starts and we are not even the beginning or the centre of the story. Sometimes we have this bloated and distorted idea that we are it. Naah! The story starts with God. The source of all things, life and light. The narrator tells the story one step after the other. And its mostly God speaks and everything rushes in obedience into being. How cool.

Then when it gets to us. The story changes, God pauses. The flow is not the same. God has an important conversation. I imagine there is a light in his eyes because he has a brilliant idea. How about we create humanity. And not just create them, they should bear our image and likeness. That right there is our collective identity.

And I think this is why God is excited. This is a big deal. He has looked at everything he has created and was pleased by it. He is enjoying his work. Enough to take a break after each day. It's like, that is satisfying enough.

He is looking at the fellowship, the unity, the completeness and the glory and the love the Trinity enjoys and he is going, what if we create humanity and invite them, to all that. What if?

And he does exactly that. If we need the source to tell us the identity of the creation, then this is it. This is the first thing the creator ever says about humanity; my own image and likeness.

This is your identity: You are born to be God's enjoy God's love and be God's reflection in your world. You are called to reflect God's creativity, reflect God's care, God's love, God's joy, God's glory. This is who you are from the beginning.

Now humour me again. We were holding all the descriptors we had about who we are. You said you were black or white. You said you were male or female you said you were Kenyan or not. You said you were a doctor or a carpenter. Now I want you to mental move them further down the list and in the first place put identity: you are God's image and likeness.

Let's just pause there for a second. I know that it is not the first time we have encountered this verse. We say it so casually. But I want you to ask yourself, what difference does it make if you see yourself primarily as this? What difference does it make in your marriage? In Your business? In your friendships? In your relationship or singlehood?

One day Jesus was hanging out with his disciples and he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

And he was a big deal and everybody always has something to say about famous people. So the disciples are kind of excited to be the ones in the inner circle and so they jump on this question so fast with a bit of excitement. Saying things like "I have heard people say John the Baptist" That was a preacher in their time who had been baptising people and Herod murdered him. So people hearing about Jesus were going he has already come back to life.

Another says, "I have heard them say you are Elijah" Now Elijah was an even older prophet from many years ago. Tradition had it that he would come back to earth. So some were looking at Jesus and trying to guess if this is that. And others even other prophets.

They could see in Jesus something that puzzled and like the world, they already were trying to define his identity. Either because of how he looked or his family or the way he talked or something he did. Whatever it is, the world will want to define your identity.

Be careful not to let any of the world's description fit you into a mould. Because Jesus was like all of those yet unlike any of those. And him asking this question was not about him not knowing his identity.

So here is how the story continues. He switches the question in a way the disciples did not expect. And asks, "Who do you say I am?" And finally, they went quiet because they just realised that it is way easier to talk about what other people think Jesus is yet they also had not yet figured out what they think about him.

Here is why that is more important. They were his followers. They loved him. With him, they felt something they could not quite put their finger on. Around him, it felt like Heaven is just breaking in now... So who they think he is said a lot about who they think they are. His identity said a lot about theirs. And so, they paused.

One of them moved forward and said,

Matthew 16:16-19

You are the Anointed One. You are the Son of the living God.

Jesus: Simon, son of Jonah, your knowledge is a mark of blessing. For you didn't learn this truth from your friends or from teachers or from sages you've met on the way. You learned it from My Father in heaven. This is why I have called you Peter (rock): for on this rock I will build My church. The church will reign triumphant even at the gates of hell. Peter, I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Peter gets it right and when he sees Jesus for who Jesus is, he begins to see himself for who he really is. I like this translation saying, This is why I have called you, the rock. So maybe Jesus in their crew has just been calling him Peter and who knows if he is going, "Why does this guy keep calling me the rock?" Or maybe he is excited that Jesus has a little pet name for him.

Have you realised that when we love people we have a pet name for them? Or in a group, we single out those who are close to us by calling them differently from what everybody else calls them or give them a pet name when everybody else keeps their name? I have a name that only my family calls me. And every time I hear someone call me that I turn and go, "Where did you get that?" These names reveal who they are to us.

But it never made sense to Peter until now. Listen, our identities do not start to even sink in or make sense to us until we can see Jesus for who he really is... It is only when we meet Jesus when we see God for who he is, can we see us for who we are.

So can we see God for who he is? Creator. Every day the puzzles of this universe. The exciting things and even the terrifying things in nature speak of the wonders of God. Forget the little planet that we are having trouble taking care of. The ever-expanding universe. God

spoke ones and to this day the universe is still responding to his voice. There are stars being born to this day, what this means is these stars are still responding to God's command, "Let there be light".

We are discovering new species of animals, birds, fishes and insects and clearly even of pathogens like viruses. Some are gone extinct and some we have not taken care of well and made them extinct. Life is springing out still on obedience to the voice of God.

Jesus is the King fo Kings and Lord over all the universe. Empires have come and gone, governments and nations have come and gone but the Kingdom of God still stands. That is God in all his splendour and that does not even begin to cover it.

The revelation of Jesus to John or what is simply called the book of revelation talks about how God will give each one of us a new name. It's like this Peter moment. When we finally see God for who he is in all his glory, we finally get to know our name. The name God calls us specifically.

Yet that begins now. The Kingdom of God is now and so us meeting our identity is now. The Kingdom of God comes in full when Jesus returns which means that we get the complete picture of our identity including our special names when we meet Jesus. Yet that begins now. And we start that journey by looking at God and who he is. Because who he says a lot about who we are.

So back to my earlier question. If your primary identity is to be God's image and likeness? Are you living from that place? Before you are black or white before you are Kenyan or British before you Conservative or liberal? Before you are Male or female? Are you living out your life from a place of knowing you are loved? That God was so excited at the thought of you that things paused and took a different rhythm? That you are invited to enjoy completeness, fellowship, honour, glory.

Secondly, how are you reflecting God's goodness in your business? In your marriage? In your relationship? To your employees? To the world around you? How are you reflecting god's creativity? God's love, God's unity, completeness, Holiness, glory as and now you can start the whole other list. As Kenyan, a teacher, a husband, a white male or a black female. Everything else is secondary to this.