

Chapter 2. Being Human. That's what we're thinking about today. What is it to be a human being? What is our purpose? How have we been created to live our lives. These questions are answered right here in the first few chapters of the Hebrew text called Genesis. As we reflected on last week, the first creation story tells us that to be alive is a gift. It teaches us that we are the bearers of God's own image. Every person with a beating heart is a kind of reflection of the divine. And every human person has been created to be co-creators with God. And God said that it is all VERY GOOD.

This week, we ponder the second creation story, a story that is much older than the first, and this story tells us that in every moment of our lives we have a choice. A choice to be ALIVE or not to be alive. A choice to participate in God's creation or attempt to thwart God's divine plan. And that choice is illustrated for us in the story of the two trees.

Many miss the fact that in the story of God's Eden, God placed everything, every plant and fruit and vegetable and so on, but also smack in the middle of paradise, God placed not one, but two trees. Yes, we're all quite familiar with the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. That's the tree from which the sneaky snake tricked Eve into eating. But there's another tree in the middle of the garden. It's the *Tree of Life*. This tree is a kind of sacred tree that is found in myths all over the globe since the beginning of time. Each tree has a seductive power and we get to choose, moment by moment, which tree will we eat from and let shape how we live our lives.

Brian McLaren, in his book "We Make the Road by Walking" offers us a very refreshing interpretation of the Tree of Good and Evil. What if, choosing the Tree of Good and Evil, was about choosing to play God? And the way we choose to be God is to judge what is good and what is bad.

God already deemed everything good in our first creation story, but after the first humans were drawn to the Tree of Knowledge, they determined what was good and what was bad. Their first judgment was that they recognized that they were naked, and nakedness is apparently bad, so they had to cover themselves up.

When we find ourselves judging, we can recognize that this is a form of playing God and this is what we must ask for forgiveness of and then turn to the Tree of Life. Judging is something God does and does well. God's judgment is always wise and fair, true and merciful and always restorative. Our judgment however is ALWAYS ignorant and biased, retaliatory and devaluing. Always.

One thing that we have to clearly understand though is something we discussed in our two classes this week. It is part of our living to judge the things that happen in the world, to judge behaviors. For a functioning society, we must make judgments on actions. For example, when a boy kicks a dog, we can judge that action to be bad, but we must never judge that the boy is bad. As a teacher, it was drummed into us in teacher school that it is the child's behavior that may be bad, but it is never the child herself who is bad.

If you remember the movie and book “Dead Man Walking” you’ll remember the nun, Sister Prejean, making the judgment that the crime Matthew Poncelet committed was horrific! Absolutely horrific. A crime that earned him the death penalty in our justice system. But Sister Prejean never saw Matthew himself as bad. What Matthew did was horrific, yes! But who Matthew was, as a child of God, was good. She taught us that it is appropriate to hate the sin, but we must always love the sinner.

I believe with my whole being that despite what we do, God loves us. And we’re taught in our Christian tradition from a very very young age that nothing we do can ever separate us from the love of God. Nothing. If the first creation story is correct in that we have been created to bear the image of God, then the image we must bear is love. And love means we see all of God’s creation as Good.

So now let’s talk about our judging nature. It is very natural for us to put people in boxes. We constantly label and define everyone we meet. We actually can’t help it. Unfortunately, or fortunately, however you want to perceive it, we have been given free will which means we have a choice. The choice is to reflect God or act as if we are God.

And so, here’s a suggestion of what you might do to keep away from judging others and playing God yourself. Our judgments are merely thoughts. Someone walks into my office with green hair and I make a judgment. I label that person good or bad based on a color. It is a thought. But here’s the thing. We are not our thoughts. We also cannot control what thoughts pop into our heads much like we cannot control what dreams we have. BUT we do have control, we do have a choice, as to what we do with that thought. The first choice is to grab onto that thought – ‘green hair is bad.’ Then mull it over in our minds – ‘that person has green hair because they want to be offensive.’ Then we let it shape our thinking about all people who color their hair “unnatural colors”- ‘those people are not like me, they must do drugs because you have to be high to do something that crazy.’ Then your thought becomes a truth for you. It becomes your vision of a group of people – ‘people with green hair do drugs.’

Your thinking may shape a number of ways but grabbing onto a judgment which is merely a thought, and letting it shape how you see the world, is going to lead you into behavior that is ignorant, biased and de-valuing. So next time you have a thought where you are judging another, try this. You notice a woman at the check-out stand has blue hair, and you think, ‘That woman has blue hair.’ Before you let that thought take hold, before you invite that thought into your brain to mull over and produce a judgment, you notice that it is just a thought - and you let it go. Letting your thoughts float in and then out of your mind is a spiritual practice. The Buddhists call it the art of detachment. When we can be detached from these judging thoughts, when we can notice them and then just as quickly let them go, we do not allow our judgments to create a vision which then creates our behavior toward another one of God’s children. And that thinking opens the door to the idea that I am better than that person over there. That thinking rejects the teaching that everything God creates is good. That thinking turns us away

from God by acting like God. And the more we judge, the more we accuse, the farther we get from being the image of God.

To be the bearer of God's image is a big responsibility. It is a choice that is before us every single moment of our lives. Do we eat from the Tree of Aliveness and participate in God's creative power by reflecting God's love for all creation and deeming all creation as VERY GOOD, or do we eat from the Tree of Knowledge and separate ourselves from God by playing God ourselves.

Paul teaches the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. That mind does not judge. That mind accepts all human beings as children of God. That mind can only love and having the mind of Christ is the fruit from the Tree of Life.

*Let us pray:*

Divine Creator, you made all things and all things are so very good. You honored us, we mere humans, to reflect You into the world. May our reflection of you be holy and true. May we turn away from acting like a god, and choose instead to reflect Your image. Help us bear Your image of love and light into a world where there is hatred and darkness. Lead us to the Tree of Life where we may be fed abundantly. Amen.