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Genesis 4:1,2,6-8,25-5:5

IT'S TIME FOR A BRAND NEW IMAGE!

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As we approach Christmas and the end of the year, we reflect upon what we would really like to see in our lives. There are many gifts that we might enjoy, but most of us would like to see some permanent changes in our lives. We aren't happy with ourselves. We would like to see a whole new image. I've always struggled with my weight. It would be wonderful if I could lose fifty or sixty pounds and keep it off. As long as I'm wishing, I could use a little more hair in the right place. It wouldn't hurt if I looked a little younger and had some new clothes to go with the rest of the changes. You might as well throw in a new sports car to drive.

Even more importantly, I wish that I had a whole new image as far as my life is concerned. I wish that I didn't have to deal with sinful desires: lust, greed, selfishness, anger, envy, jealousy, lack of thankfulness and many other things. I wish that I did not have to fight my Old Adam every day in order to do the right thing. Weren't we all created in the image of God? What happened? How did we lose it? What were the consequences? Can we ever get it back? These are questions we hope to answer on the Fourth Sunday in Advent. IT'S TIME FOR A BRAND NEW IMAGE!

We are told that God made man in his own image. The very first chapter of Scripture tells us, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'" What does that mean? It cannot mean that we looked like God since God is a spirit. The image of God is chiefly a spiritual gift. It affected man's entire being, body and soul.

That may bring up another question. What is a soul? We speak of the soul often. What is a soul? It is not easy to describe, but not impossible either. The soul is an essential part of you. It is distinct from the body, but very closely connected to the body. The soul is what makes you a unique and distinct person. Even though we cannot physically see it, it is an essential part of your being. The body is material. It is made up of physical organs such as eyes and ears, hands and feet, heart and lungs, and other things. It is made up of atoms and molecules. We can see and feel it. The soul, on the other hand, is immaterial. It cannot be weighed or seen. But it is there.

If we wanted to say that the soul had organs, we might say that there are three. First of all are the emotions. We are very familiar with them. We feel likes and dislikes, affection and aversion. We may not even know why. Our emotions are the easiest to excite by the physical senses of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. And then there is the will. We make choices. We decide what we want to do and what we do not want to do. Love and hate may begin in the emotions, but are carried out by the will. Unbelief, our natural state is also in the will.

Finally there is the ability to reason, to make judgments, to decide one way or another. We think of consequences of our actions and weigh them. It is not always easy to differentiate between our emotions, will, and reason because ultimately all of them are involved in almost every decision that we make. Our emotions may make us want to buy that expensive new sports car, reason offers restraint and our will makes the ultimate decision.

The reasoning, the will and the emotions of the soul will become evident through the actions of the body. A greedy soul will lead the hands to steal something from another. A noble soul will use those same hands to give and to help.

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Everything in their souls was attuned to God. Emotions, intellect and will were in perfect harmony with God. The emotions were naturally drawn to a gracious God and his will. The will was perfectly free and able to love God and choose obedience to God's Word and to refuse sin and evil. Reason was able to ponder the goodness of God and live a life that would delight its creator. Adam and Eve had the ability to love God perfectly, completely and freely. They were not robots, programmed to simply go through the motions that God had installed in them.

The most important component of the image of God was the holiness and righteousness. Their holiness was a total separation from sin. They possessed righteousness. They were right with God. There was no sin for God to forgive. That holiness and righteousness made their bodies and souls immortal. They would live forever, because only sin brings death. They possessed the image of God. They were free to live forever. They were free to serve God in every possible way.

The image of God was lost when Satan tempted Adam and Eve into believing that they could no longer trust God and his promises to them. They chose to believe Satan's lies rather than God's truth. There was no reason to doubt God's Word, but they would do so anyway. You can see how Eve's soul worked. Lust is an emotion. She desired the forbidden fruit and every second that passed made her more determined to have it. Her reason now concluded that it would be better if she no longer had God in her life. She had found a new friend in Satan and he would never lie to her. Finally her will made the ultimate choice. Her brain sent the impulses to her body. She picked up the fruit, ate it and then gave it to her husband and he ate it as well.

Our text showed us what happened. Sin and death came into the world. It affected every single one of us. God had told them that if they did eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. They did not know what these words meant, but now they would know from experience exactly what death was. The basic meaning of death is separation. They were separated from God. That is now our natural condition. We are spiritually blind to truth, dead in our sins and enemies of God.

Adam and Eve had a son named Cain. They were excited. Every parent looks forward to the birth of his or her child. They have hopes and dreams. They think of all the possibilities. When Adam and Eve sinned, God announced that he would send a Savior who would crush the head of Satan and once more restore peace with him. Might Cain be that Savior? The Hebrew leaves it open that Eve believed that her son just might be that serpent crusher. Alas, it was not to be. Far from it! They would have another son named Abel.

Cain was a farmer while Abel was a shepherd. These were both noble professions. Both sons would hear their parents speak of the sad day when they decided not to trust God and the consequences of their actions. Both would be told that God was good and loving and gracious. Both would be encouraged to bring God offerings of love and they would do so. We hear that God would look with favor upon Abel and his offering and did not look with favor upon Cain and his offering. Many people have tried to explain why. The simplest explanation comes in the letter to the Hebrews: "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings." Abel loved and trusted God. Cain loved and trusted himself.

Cain was not happy. He didn't like it that God accepted his brother's offering while he was not pleased with Cain's. His resentment and jealousy grew. God would warn Cain about the potential dangers if he continued to let these things fester in his soul. Cain would ignore God's warning. When an appropriate time presented itself, Cain took

his brother out in the field and killed him. What a horrible thing! We have the first murder. It was carried out with deliberate deceit against a brother and a good man. It was the first but it certainly would not be the last!

The image of God is replaced by our original sin. Do you understand how important the first three chapters of Genesis really are? Most of the world simply laughs at the thought that they might be true. They explain why evil is in this world. We have to understand what happened after we lost the image of God. We are all born with original sin. We know what lives within us. We don't want to admit it, yet our thoughts often ask, "What was I thinking? How could I have done such a thing? How could I have thought such evil? Where do these thoughts come from?" This is what we have inherited from Adam and Eve, our first parents. This is what we pass on to our children and grandchildren.

We hear those words in Genesis remind us that Adam had a son in his image, in his likeness. They conclude with the words, "And he died!" These words are repeated over and over again. They are like the tolling of a bell. If we are human, we will experience separation from God. By nature we are separated from God because of sin. When we experience physical death, our soul will separate from our body. Unless something happens, we will face eternal separation from God.

My friends, the good news is that Jesus Christ came to restore the image of God to his fallen creatures. In this week we will contemplate the miracle of the incarnation. God became man. He became a lowly servant so that he could bring us back to the position that we once enjoyed. Christmas is not a gooey, mushy sentimental story. It is the story of God's love in restoring his image once again in fallen man.

Jesus Christ was born to destroy the devil's work. He came to do what we were unable to do by keeping the Law perfectly in our stead and he came to undo what our sins had done by taking them into his own body. Jesus would bring us the forgiveness of sins. He would take them away as far as the east is from the west, drowning them in the depths of the sea. The holiness and righteousness that we need is now restored. The original image of God was innate. It was something that Adam and Eve had from the time of their creation. The new image of God in each believer is imputed. We receive the holiness and righteousness of Christ. Even though we are still sinners who struggle against our sinful desire every day of our lives, we have been credited with Christ's righteousness. God no longer sees our sins. He sees only the righteousness of his Son. What has changed is our status. Since our sin has been forgiven through faith in the Gospel, we are no longer children of wrath. Rather we are God's precious children.

It is time for a whole new image. It is time for the image of God to be restored to us. That is what Christmas is all about. That is why the Son of God is born and found lying in a manger. This is good news, joy to the world! May God bless our celebration of Christmas! AMEN.