

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church

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"Hidden Images"

Genesis 1-2:4a

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Back when I was in grade school or middle school a new kind of art, or print suddenly began to become popular. You'd see them hanging up in random places, like the mall, or airports, or doctors' offices. You might find books of them on coffee tables.

Technically they are called "single image stereograms". You probably know them by their more common name: "Magic Eye" images.

Some of you know how these work. There is a poster or a page that looks like a small simple pattern, repeated texture all across the page. It looks like a whole lot of nothing.

But if you stared at it long enough...
and deep enough,
if you allowed your eyes to see beyond the surface of the page,
a hidden image would appear, an image with depth and dimension. It's like the background would move way beyond the page and something unexpected would emerge.

I remember when I was first trying to see what was "supposedly" there. There were a few friends that told me to just keep looking and wait and eventually I'd see it.

And so, I'd look.

And I'd look.

And I'd look.

But it wasn't happening. After awhile I thought maybe they were pulling my chain. There wasn't anything there.

So I gave up. Of course it wasn't me.

It's just a stupid poster.

But like I said, these images were pretty popular. So a month would go by and there was another one and I'd try again. Nothing. It was a bit frustrating, so I really didn't like those posters for a while. They just didn't make sense to my eyes.

And so after awhile, I gave up on them. Didn't even try anymore. A year went by, maybe two. I can't remember...

But at some point I found myself giving another one a look. Staring deeper into it...

and deeper

and waiting...

and finally it happened. I saw it.

The depth, the dimension.

Something moved to the background, something else came forward. And finally, I could see the image that the artist had put there for me to discover.

Lately I've been thinking about how much these posters... remind me of people. There is something there, something hidden, a depth and beauty. **An image** that the artist hopes we'll learn to see because it really is the essence of who they are.

That's what this magnificent poem that opens the grand story of the Bible tells us. I love Genesis 1. It's become one of my favorite passages in the Bible. The rhythm, the poetry, the imagery... all of it works together and moves my soul in a very unique way.

We start with this formless, chaotic, deep... like the chaos of a dark, churning ocean.... like the chaos of our world.

And over those chaotic waters, God begins to speak life and order and beauty into being.

It begins with this separation of the light and the dark, and God sees it and says, "It is good." Day 1.

And there is separation of the waters into sea and sky, and God sees it and says, "It is good." Day 2

And there is the pulling back of the sea so that dry land, firm and fertile, can appear... and God sees it and says, "It is good." Day 3.

And then, each of these three days that created 3 different arenas of creation...the arenas of light and dark, sky and sea, dry and firm land... are now filled with more creation.

So there is sun and moon, to govern the light and the dark.... and God sees it and says, "It is good." Day 4

Then there are fish and birds, deep-sea creatures and soaring eagles, to fill the sea and sky. And God sees it and says, "It is good." Day 5

And then the land is filled with all kinds of creatures and animals. And God sees it and says, "It is good." **Day... wait, not yet!**

This day isn't over when you expect it, but the pattern breaks...it does something new, it does something unlike everything else before it.

Yes, day 5 was good, but it wasn't finished.

This day is extended.

God pauses the rhythm and makes **humankind**. And God makes us with something unique.

A stereogram of sorts. A hidden image.

The spark of the holy.

The image of the Divine deep in us. And verse 27 states this creating 3 times in a row. It's the ancient way of bolding and underlining for emphasis.

**"So God created human kind in God's own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female God created them."**

And now, at the end of this day of creation, with the image of God placed in this new creature... with the image of God placed in you, God says something **different**. God saw everything that God had made and it isn't simply "good" anymore. Now it is "**very good**." Day 6.

Here in the opening pages of the Bible, we have this profound mystery that is the foundation for so much that follows, but it's a profound mystery that we so often forget or miss in our lives.

Each and every human being carries within him or her the spark of the Divine. The image, the life, the reflection, the flickering flame of God's own life. Each and every human being.

Do you see how radical and challenging that idea is?
For it to be in every person,
 in every city and neighborhood,
 in every race and tribe,
 in every religion, and every culture, and every language,
 in every human being,
 there is the spark of God in them.

Yes, it's more hidden in some than others.
Yes, it can be quite hard to see.
And in some people it's almost impossible to believe, I know.
 But it is there.

The spark of God is in each person you encounter...
 and (this is what I really want you to hear) ***and in each person you***
dismiss....
 in each person you overlook
 or ignore...
 or simply want to pretend they aren't really there.

Many of you know I spent my college summers living and working in a small village known as Croc, outside of Monterrey, Mexico. This village was made up of a combination between squatter shacks and simple 1-2 room cinderblock homes. It was dirty, and hot, and dry...

And the kids of the village always ran around, doing whatever they wanted to do... getting into trouble, playing games.

It's not that their parents weren't around. It's just a different kind of culture in a village like that. You don't stay in your own yard, because you don't have a yard. You don't hang out inside your house, because your house is nothing more than a family bedroom.

So they ran around, always looking to do something.

So you can imagine when a bunch of ***gringos***, like us, showed up for the summer, it was like the circus coming to town.

There were a handful of kids who were always around, trying to get us to play with them, or do them a special favor, or buy them something from the snack stand in the shack across the street from the church where we were working.

But of course, you can't just buy everyone a snack everyday. It's one of those tricky things. And so, as much as you hate to, you almost always have to say, "no."

Sometimes they'd give you puppy dog eyes and whine a little, "**Profa...**" short for "**porfavor**" or "**pleeeeeease.**" Let's just say that whining in any language is not endearing.

So again I would say, "**no pudeo.**" "**I can't.**"

And then they would give me an angry look, slap their elbow with their hand, and spitefully say, "**codo**" which means, "**elbow.**" I don't quite understand it, but apparently it's an idiom for calling someone a "**cheapskate.**"

Truth be told, some of those kids were a lot of hassle, always getting into trouble. Things were just easier when they weren't around.

I remember one little boy in particular whose name was Bralio. Bralio was probably 6 or 7 my first summer there.

Part of why Bralio stands out in my mind is because he had a tracheotomy, a hole in his neck, with this plastic tube that he used to breath and even talk. It was always dirty. There was mucus around it. It was dusty.

But it didn't slow Bralio down; he played and got in trouble with the rest of them.

I remember very clearly one day early on, when Bralio looked at my bottle of water and asked for a drink. And the thing is, not only did Bralio have this dirty trach, he, like many of the kids, also had rotting teeth.

I'm sure they never saw a dentist, let alone a tube of toothpaste.

So when he asked for a drink from my water bottle, I froze.

Sure, I could give him water... but what kind of germs would I be taking in my mouth when he handed it back to me?

Not to mention, a request like this was never a one-time thing. If you open this door, there is no going back. A drink of water from **my water bottle** for Bralio on this day means sharing **my** water bottle with every random kid every day.

I froze. I looked at the mucus-covered trach.

I saw his brown, rotting teeth and filthy clothes.

What I didn't see was the spark of the divine, the beautiful image of God in him.

What I didn't see was the holy beauty and wonder of the presence of Christ, standing right there before me in the body of this dirty, pestering child.

And of course, that wasn't the only time. ***The truth of the matter is, we tend to see most people as these flat, two-dimensional repeating patterns on a page.*** Nothing all that special. Nothing worth looking at.

But I can't help but wonder how different our world might be if we learned how to look, if we learned how to see the depth, the dimension.

What might happen if we looked long enough into the humanity of people to see the surface of that person moved to the background, and watch something else come forward.?

How would **you** be different if you could see the image that the artist had put in, right there in another human being?

... the image the artist had put there, inside the person in your office or at your school that you try to avoid?

... the image the artist had put there, inside the **hillbilly living** in a trailer?

... the image the artist had put there, inside **the illegal immigrant?**

... the image the artist has put there, **inside the transgender teenager you'd rather not talk about?**

...or the **awkward neighbor** on your street you'd prefer to avoid

...or the **person at church** that rubs you the wrong way

...or the person in **your family** that you keep fighting with

...or the middle-eastern **Muslim,**

...or the **black man** coming down the street.

How would you be different if you could see the beautiful, multi-dimensional image of God in them?

How would you be different if you could see the divine spark, that holy presence that the Artist put inside.... you... deep inside you... for the world to see?

You are carrying this same divine spark, this holy, beautiful image that every other human being that has been and ever will be has.

**"God created human kind in God's image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female God created them."**

That's nice to know...

about as nice as knowing you're supposed to see something in a poster that you can't see.

Knowing it, but not seeing it, may just leave you frustrated.

Chances are, you're not going to want to talk about those posters.

You'd rather ignore the whole thing.

It's just uncomfortable for you. At least it was for me.

Until you learn **how** to see. It's not easy. It takes some work. There's a grace in training your eyes to look deep enough. It doesn't just happen. It takes work, and patience, and a holy curiosity.

And most of all... **Looking!**

Not averting your eyes, but looking.

Choosing to look at those people on the edge you'd rather not see.

That is after all, what Jesus is always challenging us to do.

He looks and sees people that nobody else wants to see.
And he sees them as more than an inconvenience,
or a side problem,
or an uncomfortable topic.

Do you remember when the unclean, bleeding woman touches him and he knows something happened...with someone... but he wants to **see** her? And when he does **see** her, he calls her **"little daughter,"** this endearing personal term.

The **man with the withered hand** and the **bent over woman** that most are so used to over-looking each week on their way into the temple, Jesus sees. He touches them.

He heals them even though the people there at church that day thought, **"This is not really the time or place for that sort of thing, Jesus. You're disrupting what is going on with everyone else for just a couple people, Jesus."**

The prostitutes. The lepers. The children. The man who has been lame for 38 years, lying on his mat... while the crowds of people pass him by. Jesus sees them.

He sees the beauty and sacred image of God hidden in the soul of every man, woman, and child. He sees the beauty and sacred image of God in the very people that the rest of us would rather not think about...

And not only that,
but he sees the beauty and sacred image of God...
right **inside of you.**
He sees **you.**
He knows **you**... better than you even know yourself.

In a flash, all those stories of Jesus went through my mind. And slowly, reluctantly, I held out my water bottle.

I wish I could say I did it eagerly, with joy... and without a bit of disgust, but I'd be lying to you.

But fast forward to the next summer. I was the only one who returned from our team. Everyone else with me was new. It was **their** first day. We were being introduced to the community.

And while the local pastor was talking, one of my co-worker's face looked shocked and pale as I handed my water bottle to one of the kids... without even thinking about it.

"I can't believe you did that," she said to me later that night. Didn't you see their teeth? And so I told her... that it was hard for me at first too. But I'd had time with these people. I'd gotten to know Bralio as more than some dirty street kid.

It took me awhile, but now I see him.
A little boy,
born in a little town,
to unwed parents,
in the middle of nowhere.
I'm not sure if Bralio's dad was a carpenter or more likely a mason.

But either way, I can see him now.

There, in Bralio's eyes,
in his playing, and even in his words, "I thirst." I can see Him.

Yes, it took me a long time. But eventually, the surface faded into the background,
and the depth and beauty of the artist's own image finally came into focus.

Now, if only I could learn to see it in every other human being too.
It's a lot easier in the face of a child than it is in the face of an adult.
And truth be told, I don't most of the time.
I don't let my eyes linger long enough.

But by the grace of God, I'm working on it.
And I hope as a church, that we'll keep working on it together.
So that together, we can give each other clues to the hidden images of God inside of
every human soul.

Amen.

Prayer

*In the morning light, O God,
may I glimpse again your image deep within me
the threads of eternal glory
woven into the fabric of every man and woman.
Again may I catch sight of the mystery of the human soul
fashioned in your likeness
deeper than knowing
more enduring than time.
And in glimpsing these threads of light
amidst the weakness and distortions of my life
let me be recalled
to the strength and beauty deep in my soul.
Let me be recalled
to the strength and beauty of your image in every living soul.*

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