

Lenten Small Group Study 2021

grounded in the living word chapter 03

imago Dei

read

Genesis 1.1-2.4a

note: you may wish to divide the reading among participants and Bible translations.

share

Using this passage, let us consider how we view our Triune God. Some questions to ponder:

- Where do you see the three Persons of God evident in the two creation stories?
- What is familiar about your understanding of our Creator, our Redeemer, our Comforter in this passage? What new perspective do you gain about each?
- How does God see us in this passage? How do we see ourselves reflected in our Creator, who made us in God's image?
- How does this reflection inform or alter the way we view God? Ourselves? Others?

As we remember God's wonderfully creative and intentional act to fashion form out of emptiness, to shape order out of chaos, we may wish to engage in an innovative act of our own. Some questions to ponder:

- How would you fill in the statement, "I wonder ____ about God."
- What do your responses reveal about your understanding of or image of God?
- What do you learn about yourself in the process? (Hopkins and Koppel 54, 56)

Hopkins and Koppel note that a "growing body of literature addresses the formation of God images within us and how these images contribute to health and well-being." (Hopkins and Koppel 56). Besides scripture, we may learn about God through our parents, care-givers, communities of faith, in both positive and negative ways. Some questions to ponder:

- When did you first discover God, or become aware of God? How? Did you have a positive or negative view of God?
- Has your understanding of God been shaped by pastors or members of faith communities? In what ways?
- How has your view of God been life-giving? How has it not? How has it changed?

—How does your view of God inform your relationships with others, whether in your family, in the church, in the community?

Hopkins and Koppel remind us of the many images of God used within scripture, and how these images inform us, when they write:

For many of us, the Bible has shaped our image of God in powerful ways. Almost all of the language about God in the Bible is metaphorical, “because human language can never speak adequately about divine reality.” *Metaphor* comes from the Greek: *meta* means “trans” or “across” and *phor* is from *pherein*, meaning “to carry.” A metaphor “carries across” or transfers meanings from one thing to another. Metaphors help us to speak imaginatively of a lesser-known thing in terms of a better-known thing. Using metaphor, we evoke and organize associations and embrace new understandings. Some biblical metaphors for God come from the natural world: God is an eagle (Deut. 32.11) or a rock (Psalm 31.2-3). Most metaphors for God come from the human sphere of emotion and family and societal roles.... (Hopkins and Koppel 58-59)

Some questions to ponder:

- Skimming through the Psalms, the prophets, the gospels, and Paul’s letters, how many images of God can you find?
- Which images most closely capture your understanding of God? Which challenge your understanding of God?
- How do these images of God make you feel, about God, about yourself, about others? (Hopkins and Koppel 66)

Related to the images of God are the names for God. Hopkins and Koppel share that

Central to the process of identity development in the Hebrew Bible is the ability to name, for in naming, identity comes into being. “Not to possess a name is tantamount to nonexistence in the world view of the ancient Near East. Name-giving was thus associated with creation and domination, for the one who gives a name has power over the object named.” In Genesis 1, God names day and night, the sky, the earth, and the sea, thereby establishing divine sovereignty over them. The man/earth creature (*ha’adam*) in Genesis 2.20 names each of the living creatures God brings to him/it in search of an *‘ezer kenegdo* (counter-part), thereby establishing dominion over them. In Genesis 2.23, this *ha’adam* does not name “woman” with the same formula of naming used for animals, so he does not claim power over her. Hosea names his children Lo-ruhamah, meaning “Not pitied,” and Lo-ammi, meaning “not my people” (Hos. 1.6, 9), as signs concretizing God’s punishment of an idolatrous Israel. Here we find the danger inherent in naming. Naming can be a powerful means of constructing the world, but also of shaming and controlling it. The images that we think we see of God and of ourselves can have significant influence...for good or for ill.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the embodied manifestation of God's Self. We struggle to name this reality: Jesus' identity is both fully God and fully human, inextricably linked and at the same time impossibly nameable. Yet in our struggle to name, we learn that our truest and deepest identity is connected to God's Self, and our identity is always in the process of reaching toward its fullest response in communion. (Hopkins and Koppel 85- 86)

Some questions to ponder:

- What are some names for God?
- What name would you give to God?
- What name do you suppose God has given to you?
- What name would you give yourself as a beloved child of God?
- What name would you give to our community of faith?
- How do the images of God, the names of God, help you tell your story? Help us tell our story as a church family?

meditate

As finite humans, our comprehension of God, our view of God, our names for God, are limited in scope. We are only able to perceive a mere glimpse of the glory and majesty of our Triune God. And yet. Our gracious God invites us to engage in a lifelong journey towards understanding who God is, what God has done, how God seeks after us and loves us and transforms us. We are given, through the Word of God, this remarkable gift —both as individuals and as a community of faith. Let us embrace God in all of God's glory, and let us open ourselves to God's redeeming and reconciling work.

pray

O God of Infinite Images, we pray that we might come to embrace you, who comes to us in the myriad metaphors of biblical story, in our imaginations, and in our encounters with one another. Keep us from staking too narrowly our claim to the richness and mystery of your holy ground as we engage in our ministries of care. May we minister in and beyond the imaginable in many ways, trusting that you meet us there. Amen. (Hopkins and Koppel 88)

based upon and adapted from *Grounded in the Living Word: The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices* by Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010)