

On the sin of racism

I am the image of God. We can all say, “I am the image of God.” It is a universal truth of faith and hope revealed in Sacred Scriptures’ first chapter. Everything that follows is under this premise. Whoever we are, whatever we look like, we can say, “I am the image of God.” May all the people of God say “Amen.”

The sin of racism is to discredit this truth and to steal this hope.

This is such an important concept, but what does *the image of God* mean?

Does it mean God once looked like this?



This is a reconstruction of “Lucy” who lived around 3.2 million years ago and is judged to be one of our earliest human ancestors.

Or how about like Homo Habilis?



The *handy man* invented tools and is often considered to be the first member of the genus Homo. Homo habilis existed between about 2.5 and 1.6 million years ago.



We’re discovering Neandertal DNA in modern humans. Does God look like this?

The only surviving human species on earth is Homo Sapiens, *thinking man*. We’ve been around for about 300,000 years. So does God look like this?



or this



or this



or this



or this



or this



Or maybe like Ahmaud Arbery or George Floyd?



Or maybe made in the image of God isn't about appearance at all? Maybe the image of God means we "look" like God in that we share God's attributes of intelligence and freedom of choice, that through them we have been endowed with a uniquely moral character.

In God, obviously not in us, intelligence and freedom are perfect and infinite, but we all reflect God's image in that we are all also blessed with these same qualities. It is our moral and spiritual duty to nourish them and help them flourish. We are blessed with the responsibility of using these gifts to become co-creators with God. The world we live in is not fallen – that's an old and tired excuse. It's the world we tolerate. It does not have to be like this. We can be better.

There are value and worth in all of us and in each of us as the image of God. God sees the sacred in all the gloriously different people of our world. Look at all those faces above. God doesn't look like any of them, Ahmaud's and George's too, but in all of them are reflected the image of God, and God loves them all.

As our country erupts in pent-up anger at the institutional racism that has plagued us as our national original sin, church cannot be a silent bystander. Our privileged position in this community gives us the luxury of not having to care, but people of colour cannot not-care because their appearance makes it impossible to escape from racism. We have to make the choice to stand with them and protect our shared creation as the image of God, for them and for us. As prejudice in all its ugly forms tears us apart again, still, we must speak God's word of a truth far beyond the spurious importance of a person's appearance and instead look for the image of God.

People are protesting with an understandable anger in cities and towns across our country so that they may be heard because power has chosen to ignore them. In the COVID-19 pandemic, people of colour are suffering in far higher percentages than others. A young black man was killed in broad daylight by vigilantes. Police officers knelt on a black man's neck or stood aside for nearly nine minutes even after he became unresponsive. These protests cannot be answered by the execution of more force. The injustices behind them need to be addressed seriously and persistently. This benefits not only people of colour, but all of us. It unites us. It gives us the chance again to be a better people.

We must stand up and speak out for God's justice. God sees differently than we do, and as people of faith we are called upon to see as God sees. In 1 Samuel, Israel's first king is described as "a handsome young man," the son of "a man of wealth." (9:1-2) He is, however, replaced quickly with another anointed one. Samuel is sent to the Bethlehem home of Jesse to anoint the new king. When God's prophet looks upon Jesse's eldest son Eliab, he thinks to himself that this strong, young man must be God's choice. Samuel is falling into the same trap of appearances as with the first anointed

king. Instead, God warns Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (16:7)

Can you see Jesus in these two images?



His countenance and his name are there. It takes time and effort to see differently, but it's not impossible. Once he's seen, it's hard to not see him. When we look at the world "differently," we can start to see it as Jesus sees it, and then it's hard not to see it that way. It's hard not to be offended by the assault on human dignity that is racism. We can appreciate better the words of Jesus' first sermon: "Blessed are those who are persecuted." (Matthew 5:10) We can see these persecuted others, the ones whose dignity is denied by racism, as made in the image of God just like we are. An attack on their identity is an attack on ours.

It is not easy to be a people of hope right now, but ours is a God of love and justice, and it is exciting to imagine what God will do to right these persistent and immoral wrongs. Let us honour ourselves and all others as made in the image of God by what we do and say and by what we don't do and don't say. Racism is a sin. It's an affront to the people made in the image of God. WE have to be better.

For anyone who is interested, you're more than welcome to join me this Saturday, June 6th, in Greenfield at the We Stand in Solidarity protest on the Town Common.

<https://facebook.com/events/s/we-stand-in-solidarity-black-1/2756629621290339/?ti=icl>

Rev. Randy