

Our relationships with other creatures (i.e. people)

Message for Sunday, Oct. 1, 2017 by Bruce Fraser

Children's Message: from Matthew 12:46-50

I remember one Saturday morning when I was about eight years old. There was a bully on our street, and that day I was his target. He was about twelve and much bigger than me. So when he grabbed me and threw me to the ground, there wasn't much I could do, other than holler for help.

He was sitting on top of me, and with one hand had my arms pinned over my head. With his other hand he was hitting me. Just at that moment my older brother Jim came racing out from the back yard and tackled the bully, knocking him off of me. I never had any trouble with that bully from that day on.

That's what it's like to be part of a family: we care for one another.

Well guess what: you are my brother/sister! That's right! Listen to what Jesus says:

Matthew 12:50, New International Version:

"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Everyone here is your brother or your sister! We are here to care for one another.

Message: Our relationships with other creatures

1) The day a 13 year old outshone the PM

Some of you might remember an interesting day in January of 1996. Prime Minister Jean Chretien was leading a trade mission to India. With him were seven provincial premiers, plus 300 business leaders from Canada. They were in India to make deals to sell more Canadian products, and to find sources for cheap goods they needed back home. In the middle of their time there, a thirteen year old Canadian boy who happened to be in India at the same time held a press conference.

The boy was Craig Kielburger, and he was on a mission to stop child slave labour around the world. At the press conference, he described some of the factories he had seen where children as young as five worked twelve and sixteen hours a day without protective gear, for the most meagre bits of food. A boy named Nagashir told his story of working as a

slave at a carpet factory, where was beaten, whipped, burned and branded. The world was stunned. Craig had written to Chretien several times over the past year, asking the Prime Minister to do what he could to make sure goods imported to Canada were not the result of child slave labour. Someone in the Prime Minister's office wrote back, simply saying the Prime Minister was "very busy." The next day, it was Chretien who was calling Kielburger, asking if they could meet and talk.

Craig Kielburger believed that what happened to children on the other side of the world was important. They were no different than him. He felt a deep connection to them. That's what we're looking at today: the deep connection to others.

2) We are all created in the image of God

This is the Scripture we looked at last Sunday.

Genesis 1:26–28, New International Version:

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

From verse 28 "fill the earth and subdue it", we considered *how* we are to rule over the earth. Today I want to look at something else in that passage: the part where God created people.

I could focus on verse 26, where God says, "Let us make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness." There we see that, while there is only one God, this God seems to have different persons. Right in the first chapter of Genesis, we get a hint of the Trinity. But I'll save that for another day...

Instead, it's verse 27 that I'm looking at today.

Genesis 1:27, New International Version:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Now we could focus on how God created male and female together, both in God's image. That tells us that they are equally precious to God; they are equally important. Neither one can lord it over the other. I'll save that one also for another day...

There is so much we can learn about God, about life, about ourselves, in just one or two verses of the Bible! It's no wonder that Martin Luther said, "There is nothing more beautiful than the Book of Genesis, nothing more useful."

We are all created in the image of God. We are like God. I don't think that means we *look* like God, for God is not a physical being. Rather, we share some of qualities of God: we see in the Bible that God has emotions, knows the difference between right and wrong, makes moral decisions, appreciates beauty, and loves others.

That's what makes people different from the other creatures in creation. We are reflections of God. And we are precious to God.

What really caught my eye here is the fact that all people—all of humanity—have the same origin. In a sense, we are all sisters and brothers in one big family.

Because we're family, we care about one another. Besides, if someone is precious to God, that person should be important to me, too.

That's why we care about the people affected when there is a famine in Africa, or a hurricane in the Caribbean, or a flood in Bangladesh. They aren't just statistics; they are family. That's the reason why there are groups in Stirling working to bring refugees from war-torn Syria to Stirling: because they're family.

I remember seeing a cartoon some years ago. A big, fancy cruise ship has hit an iceberg. There's a gaping hole in the bow of the ship, and the ship is already tilting as it fills with water. Someone sitting in a lounge chair at the stern of the ship says to a friend, "I'm sure glad that hole is at the other end of the ship." That's the type of thinking which sees the world as "Us" and "Them." That's the type of thinking which leads to prejudice, racism, war, and

a host of other problems. When we think of others as family, that avoids many of those problems.

I'm sure you can see the difficulty with what I'm saying. When I walk down the street here in Stirling, I nod and say "Hi" to everyone I meet. Sometimes I'll stop and chat for a minute. When I'm walking through the airport in Toronto, I can't do that. When there are a thousand people walking by every few minutes, it's physically impossible to greet every single person.

In the same way, it's impossible to care individually about seven billion people around the world. I think of two responses to this dilemma: (i) Go back to the "us" and "them" way of thinking; or (ii) Do what we can.

Remember Craig Kielburger? He's older now, but his values haven't changed. He's still passionate about helping children have full and meaningful lives. And not just children, but *everyone*. Together with his brother Marc, they wrote a book about this; it's called *Me to We*. I highly recommend you read it, to get inspired, to get excited.

The key idea in their book is that the greatest things happen when people work together. Oh sure, the media love to highlight the stories of famous individuals. But the truth is, no one ever accomplished anything worthwhile by themselves. They were always part of a team working together toward a common goal.

Unlike most of my messages, I don't have any "Next Steps" for this one today. I trust you're already doing your part working for the kingdom of God. I just want to encourage you to keep on. It can be easy to get discouraged when you don't see the results you hoped for. The truth is, the fruit is there; you just don't see it. You can't measure things like trust and respect; but every time you do an act of kindness, you are building that up. Every time you deny yourself and help someone, both of you are being blessed. You are growing more like Jesus, and that is the best way others to be introduced to Jesus—by seeing him in you.

You may or may not have influence on people in other parts of the world. But we can all do what we can, in the name of Jesus Christ.