

It has been 52 weeks, as of today, for having this virtual worship. It has been a journey of blessing and also full of surprises. I am thankful that we have made it this far without missing any worship on Sundays.

Some of you were curious about my pandemic hairstyle. So, I've decided to let it hang loose today. I have not gotten any haircut since the occurrence of the pandemic. It is my way of standing in solidarity with those who suffer in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Anyway, Happy ONE-YEAR Anniversary, everyone! We have made it this far. And we are marching forward with a "Savior" sermon series in Lent.

This sermon series is about reflecting different approaches of the Cross described in the Bible. "Substitutionary atonement" was the first approach we had, where sin is defined as an action punishable by death. So, Jesus had to bleed and die on the Cross to become our Savior. The second approach was the Savior's "ransom atonement," focusing on freedom from the imprisonment we cannot escape because of our sin.

The third approach of the Cross we have today is the "Moral Example of Jesus" upon the Cross. The Moral Example perspective defines sin as our inability to fully reflect the image of God. Unlike most of the other atonement approaches centered on the Cross as the key to our salvation, the Moral Example atonement encompasses the whole of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. There is more of a focus on the whole story—from the Incarnation to the Ascension—as what saves us.

Jesus is our Savior from the day He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; on the third day, He rose from the dead; ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. That's the Moral Example atonement we recite in the Apostles' Creed.

Dying on the Cross itself does not make Jesus be our Savior. Two thieves died on the cross also with Jesus. But this death on the cross for the thieves does not make

them be our Savior. Jesus is our Savior because of the passion journey from birth to death on the Cross and the resurrection and ascension afterward.

From the birth to His baptism, Jesus fulfilled the Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament. During His three years of public ministry after the baptism, He preached and taught about God's unconditional love for all people. Upon the Cross, He showed what He preached about and what He taught about. "Jesus Christ laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16a). He clearly sends us a message, "DO AS I DO!" Through the example of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection, He shows us how to live, how to love, and how to be in full relationship with God and one another. That's our Savior's "Moral Example" atonement. Do as I do!

The fundamental belief of "Moral Example" atonement is that we are created in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Genesis 1:26). Often, the reading of Genesis 1:26 through the Western theological lens considers the Hebrew words for "image (tselem, תְּצַלֵּם)" and "likeness (demuth, דְּמוּת)" to be synonyms. However, Eastern Orthodox theologians disagree.

To the Orthodox, the words, "image and likeness" or "tselem (תְּצַלֵּם)" and "demuth (דְּמוּת)" are used distinctively to describe two different aspects of God. Image (tselem, תְּצַלֵּם) displays a "physical" image or "structural" image of the Godhead. Likeness (demuth, דְּמוּת) indicates a "functional" likeness—the idea of "acts like."

For the Wesleyan-Christians like us, United Methodists, image (tselem, תְּצַלֵּם) refers to our personal holiness which is inward piety. And, likeness (demuth, דְּמוּת) refers to social holiness which is about outward piety.

Whenever we hear *Imago Dei*, which is the Latin translation of "Image of God," we need to embrace both "image (tselem, תְּצַלֵּם)" and "likeness (demuth, דְּמוּת)."

So, being made in *Imago Dei* means God created us to resemble God. The phrase "we are made in the image of God," *Imago Dei*, refers that we have the capacity and potential to reflect God's love into the world. It means we are God's "imprint" inside out. It means that God's basic character of goodness, love, and relationality is an integral part of who we are created to be.

I believe that all people are created in the "image" of God and the "likeness" of God. Regardless of how bad we think we are and others are, all people have the

capacity and potential to be good and loving even though they sometimes fail, if not often.

It sounds like the "Moral Example" atonement is about our dependency on our works rather than on the gift of God's grace. But it is not. It is only by God's grace that we have the ability to discern Christ's example and the strength to follow it. John Wesley, the founding father of Methodism, would call this the sanctifying grace of God, which helps us daily take the actions necessary to live like Christ.

Jesus says, "Love your enemies." Can we? Let's start with a little easy one first—Love Yourself. Are we lovable at our sight all the time? Honestly, I am not, but I am trying with God's grace. How about this, "Don't judge." Don't we often compartmentalize people by putting labels and stickers on them? We separate people by lifestyle, by class, by race, by sexual orientation, by age, by gender.

I just finished my final annual report on Ministry 2020 called "Table 1,2,3" with Bill Jaeger's help. This report mandated me to label the people of Kona UMC by race, by age, by gender. This is systematic compartmentalization of God's people in church. I was uncomfortable, but I had to do it because it is a rule. Don't we often build these barriers up intentionally and sometimes unintentionally? How about putting Jesus first in our lives? How about forgiving others?

The point I am trying to make here is, without God's grace, it is impossible to follow the examples of Jesus. Thankfully, God's love for us is unwavering. Even when we screw up and don't get it right, we rest in the assurance that God does not cease caring for us. That love is enough to motivate us to get up, move forward, and try again. Sometimes, we will get it right, and sometimes we will not. But always, God loves us. And that is indeed good news for you and me. So, let us receive this good news today. Amen.