

Making God Visible

Sermon by Bob Arbogast

Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan

March 25 & 26, 2019

Scripture: *Philippians 2:1-11*

Sermon

The Bible says human beings are made in the image of God. Now, that doesn't mean we look like God. It's not as if God has two arms and two legs and two ears and two eyes. So, no; we don't look like God. But we are a reflection of God. And even though no one can see God, somehow we human beings make God visible.

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Did you ever look at a red and pink and purple sunset streaked across the sky and think how beautiful God is? Did you ever listen to the roaring of a storm and think how powerful God is? Well, it's the same thing with human beings. Just look and listen, and you get glimpses of God.

When you hear a mother singing her baby to sleep, you get a glimpse of God's gentleness. When you celebrate a couple's fortieth wedding anniversary, you get a glimpse of God's faithfulness. When you see 130 people holding hands to encircle a New Zealand mosque, you get a glimpse of God's protection. And when you watch a well-executed 6-4-3 double play on opening day, you get a glimpse of God's oneness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

BUT THAT'S NOT THE WHOLE PICTURE, IS IT? Because too often we human beings reflect ugliness instead of beauty. Too often we reflect hate instead of love. Too often we reflect division instead of unity. Too often we reflect lies instead of truth.

Just look and listen. You can't miss it. And I'm not just talking about extreme examples, like the guy who killed all those Muslims in New Zealand! No; when it comes to making God visible, we all fumble. We fumble enough to make the Detroit Lions look good.

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Just think about how selfish we are. To switch to another sport, most of the time we're like a small forward who keeps missing 3-point shots instead of passing to teammates who are in position to drive the lane. Because we don't want to share the glory. Because it's "I-me-mine!"

If you ask me, the whole idea of human beings as a reflection of God, it just doesn't work. So if you want to get glimpses of God, you'd better stick with sunsets!

BUT THERE IS JESUS. According to Scripture, Jesus is "the visible image of the invisible God." According to Scripture, Jesus "radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God." Add those two Scriptures together, and you get what Jesus tells Phillip: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

So when we look at Jesus and when we listen to Jesus, we get more than a glimpse of God. With Jesus, we see what it actually means to be God. And with Jesus, we see what it actually means to be human. In fact, Jesus shows us what it means to be human by showing us what it means to be God.

OKAY, IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BE FUSSY AGAIN, fussy about Bible translations. Some translations put Philippians 2 this way. They say something like this: "Even though Jesus is God, he made himself nothing and became a humble servant who died on the cross."

So Jesus humbled himself, even though he is God. That makes it sound like Jesus set aside what it means to be God in order to be human. That makes it sound like Jesus set aside what it means to be God in order to be the Savior.

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But that doesn't get it right. A better translation would say something like this: "Since Jesus is God, he made himself nothing and became a humble servant who died on the cross."

So Jesus humbled himself because he is God. In other words, Jesus did not set aside what it means to be God in order to be human, in order to be the Savior. No; Jesus expressed exactly what it means to be God by becoming human, by becoming the Savior.

SOMETIMES WE THINK OF GOD AS THE TOUGHEST GUY ON THE BLOCK. God doesn't back down, and no one can get the better of God. So what God says goes. God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. God says, "To hell with you, Satan," and Satan is banished.

But there's more to God than that, isn't there? Remember Elijah on the mountain? There was a face-peeling windstorm, but God wasn't in the wind. There was a mountain-crushing earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake. There was a wilderness-leveling fire, but God wasn't in the fire. No; in the middle of all that racket and ruin, God was in a quiet whisper.

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And we know that, don't we? We know how God works behind the scenes, undetected. We know how God's hand guides us and protects us, without us ever catching sight.

So God is big and small. God is loud and quiet. God is hard and soft. God is uncontainable. God is unlimited.

BUT WHEN GOD BECOMES A HUMAN BEING, when God shows up as Jesus, when God lives and laughs and loves in human skin, when God aches and cries and dies as one of us—that's when we see what it means to be God.

Nothing about Jesus is a contradiction of what it means to be God. No; everything about Jesus is a perfect expression of what it means to be God. Jesus loves us to death because God loves us to death.

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All the unstoppable power we imagine God has, all the privileges we imagine God has, all the immunity we imagine God has, immunity from pain and sorrow—that's not what we see in Jesus. Instead we see a God who weeps with those who weep. Instead we see a God who faces down the proud with humility. Instead we see a God who goes to the cross, not as a denial of what it means to be God, but as the perfect expression of what it means to be God.

SO AGAIN, JESUS SHOWS US WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GOD. And by doing that, he shows us what it means to be human. The Apostle captures that for us. He says, Have the same attitude as Jesus. He says, Love one another. He says, Show that love by valuing others more highly than you value yourself. He says, Show that love by looking out for someone else's interests instead of your own.

And none of that is a contradiction of what it means to be human. All of that is a perfect expression of what it means to be human. Because it's an imitation of Jesus, and Jesus is the perfect human being. Jesus is the perfect human being, who makes God perfectly visible.

Friends, how will you make God visible this week by following the humble steps of Jesus?

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Glory and thanks be to God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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