

**“Creature”**  
**How to be Human, Part II**  
**Grace UMC**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**August 7, 2016**

You and I are not God. We are creatures made in the image of God, a mixture of dust and divinity. That is what it means to be human. Last week we looked at what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, a God of infinite love and mercy, a God who is free, a God who is just. We saw how sin wounded the image of God in us, which is why Jesus was incarnate, died, and was resurrected - to restore us to who we were made to be. Colossians says that we are "being renewed" in the image of our Creator. Today we look at what it means to be a creature, made by God, but distinct from God.

*God of all glory,  
on this first day you began creation, bringing light out of darkness.  
On this first day you began your new creation,  
raising Jesus Christ out of the darkness of death.  
On this Lord's day grant that we,  
the people you made your own by water and the Spirit,  
may be joined with all your works  
in praising you for your great glory.  
Through Jesus Christ,  
in union with the Holy Spirit,  
we praise you now and forever. Amen.*  
(Presbyterian Book of Worship)

A friend of mine began her ordained ministry late in life; she discerned a call, went to college, and then went to seminary. She was trying to do school, work, and care for family. I watched her try to do it all and I got increasingly concerned about her. Finally, one day, trying to get through to her, I told her: "Beth, even God rested on the 7th day."

Today we look at what it means to be a creature. Put simply, we are creatures because we are different from the Creator; we come from the one who made us. Ephesians 2:10 says we are "God's handiwork," created by God and for God.

To be a creature is to be other than God, different, distinct from God. This seems like a basic point, but not everyone believes that. Not every religion believes in a particular God at all; some teach that every being, human or not, is equally divine; some religions even teach that God was once a human who evolved into divinity. But Scripture teaches and Christians have confessed for

two millennia that though we are made in the image of God - the Psalms say "a little lower than God" - we are still distinct from God. What God is and what we are are not the same, not even remotely. While we can be made more like God through sanctifying grace, we can never become what God is in God's very being. There is no application process to become a fourth member of the Trinity.

This distance between humanity and God is seen clearly in the book of Job. Job is one of the most tantalizing and fascinating books of the Bible. It's the story of a man who loses everything - a good and devout man who slowly has everything taken from him - material, relational, health, everything. All throughout, as this is going on, Job never turns on God. Some urge him to "curse God and die," but he refuses. On the other hand, his friends urge him to repent, to ask God for forgiveness, insisting that what happened to Job could only be because Job had done something that caused God's judgment - Job refuses that option, too. Throughout the book, Job poses the question to God. And for chapter upon chapter God is silent. Many of you can probably relate to a time when it seemed like God was silent in your life. I have had those times as well. St. John of the Cross called this a "dark night of the soul," a period of spiritual difficulty, or a desert experience. Job is one of the best examples in Scripture of someone who experienced God's absence in a painful way.

But then in chapter 38 - that's 3-8 - God speaks out of a whirlwind: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Did you measure the earth and set it in place? Were you there when the stars first began to sing of my glory? In other words, God says to Job, you aren't me. This is above your pay grade, above what you can know. Is it the answer Job wants? Not really. But it's as close to answer as Job gets. God does not condemn Job, in fact, God is clear that Job's friends were wrong all along - but neither does Job get a simple explanation that makes it all okay, either.

God's answer to Job reminds Job that he is a creature, a mortal, a creation of God and not God. Soren Kierkegaard, a great Danish philosopher, once said that there is an "infinite qualitative distinction" between us and God. The gap between us and God is immeasurable. God is not simply the best possible person, for instance, or an eternal version of the kindest grandfather you can imagine, but something wholly different - a Holy (h-o-l-y) Other. We are creatures, God is the creator, and there is a gap there (a gap filled by Jesus, but that is a different story for a different sermon).

This leaves us with a question: what does it mean for us to live as creatures, as beings distinct from God and dependent on God? How do we live as if we are not God?

There are a lot of possible answers to that question, but I want to focus on one: Sabbath. In the practice of Sabbath keeping we remember that we are not God

and someone else is; Sabbath means embodying, not just believing in our heads, the truth that we are creatures dependent on something outside of ourselves.

This might be the most counter-cultural practice 21st century American Christians could do.

Now, what do I mean by Sabbath? Depending on where you were raised or what you've been taught, Sabbath might bring up negative images. For many folks, "honoring the Sabbath" as the commandment says means a whole list of negatives - of things you don't do on Sundays (work, mow the grass, buy alcohol, etc.). But God's intent with Sabbath is for it to be a blessing to us, not a burden. "The Sabbath was made for humans, and not humans for the Sabbath," as Jesus taught.

In a world where "busyness" has become a status symbol, where many of us carry devices with us to ensure we are never more than a few clicks away from work, where we increasingly work longer hours so we can afford the larger house or the nicer car and impress our in-laws or keep up with our friends and we are so busy being successful we never stop to ask ourselves if we are happy...Sabbath might indeed need to be recovered as a great gift and as an act of resistance to a deadly culture.

At it's core, Sabbath means a day of rest, a day where no work is done, where time with God and family is primary. Sabbath keeping seems so basic, and yet the habit of setting aside a day a week for God and for rest can be transformative. It is very common that when a Jew who has lapsed in their spiritual life comes to a rabbi and says, "I want to be more faithful and be closer to God," the rabbi's first advice is to return to keeping Sabbath.

My favorite picture of this in pop culture is from the movie *The Big Lebowski*. John Goodman plays Walter Sobchak, a loyal but ill-tempered friend of Lebowski's who is a convert to Judaism. At one point in the movie, when told their bowling team has been scheduled for a Saturday, he gets furious and says, "I DON'T ROLL ON SHABBOS!" (Another word for Sabbath.)

Not rolling on Sabbath is a simple but powerful way of remembering that we are not God and remembering God's gifts. Biblically, Sabbath is grounded in two events: the creation, and the Exodus. We looked at the creation story in Genesis 1 last week, how God rested on the seventh day. But it's also grounded in Exodus. Jews knew what it meant to work without rest during their bondage in Egypt. Pharaoh gave them no rest, it was all production, all the time.

In a sense, many of us choose to live as the Hebrews were forced to live. Stephanie Paulsell wrote, "Exertion without rest is slavery." The Sabbath was thus God's gift to a people who for generations had been in slavery and knew no rest. And yet how many of us today live more like God's people in

Egypt than God's people in the promised land? How many of us, consciously or not, refuse to accept this good gift called the Sabbath?

If a full day is too much, and it might be, depending on your work habits or sports or other things - try a half-day of Sabbath. Try a morning. When's the last time you had a day with no agenda? Go on a spiritual retreat. Spend the night at a monastery. Do something to get in touch with this gift that God longs to give you.

It is no accident that it is often said, "More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath. the Sabbath has kept the Jews."

God's desire for each of us is that we would claim our identity as creatures made in God's image, dust and divinity made in love. God gave us that us that Sabbath so that we might remember that we are human beings and not just human doings. It is not enough to simply believe that God made us and that God made the world; Sabbath is an ongoing lesson in learning and re-learning that the world will keep on running even when we rest.