

Third Sunday of Advent
“Images of God” ~ God the Weaver
December 13, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

Welcome to Cross of Glory Lutheran Church! It's good to be together on this third Sunday of Advent, this season in which we're preparing for God's coming into our world, and this season in which we're exploring the ways that God's presence is already in the world. The theme for this Advent is "Images of God," and each week we're looking at a different image or metaphor for God that shows up in our assigned biblical texts.

Theologian Sallie McFague once wrote that "the best metaphors always give us both a shock, and a shock of recognition." The Bible is full of such metaphors. We see this in Jesus' parables, many of which we read together this summer, which draw on familiar images from daily life to give us a glimpse of God's kingdom: a mustard seed, a fishing net, a landlord, a child. The metaphors Jesus used were, like McFague suggests, both shocking *and* shockingly recognizable. We, like Jesus' disciples, may find ourselves wondering: isn't the divine supposed to be a bit...grander? More majestic? More dignified? Shouldn't the kingdom of God look a bit *less* like the mess of this world!?

We also see these mundane metaphors throughout the Old Testament, especially in the poetic language of the prophets. The past weeks we've heard passages from the book of Isaiah that describe God as a shepherd, as a potter, and tonight, as one who clothes us in "garments of salvation" and "robes of righteousness."

So today we get to ask: What does it mean to have a God who clothes us? And what does it mean to wear these godly garments? Now, there are all sorts of directions we could take tonight's exploration. As I thought more about clothing this week, I thought about the many complicated relationships we may have with clothing or our bodies, and about all different roles clothing can play. For example, clothing can be used to cover ourselves, to hide the parts of our bodies we are ashamed of or don't want the world to see. But alternatively, clothing can be used to do just the opposite: to draw attention to ourselves, to make a statement, or to express our identity. I, for example, am wearing a stole and collar right now—two articles of clothing that, without saying any words, communicates my identity as a pastor. I thought about how clothing, on the one hand, can bring people together and diminish some the things that divide us (the way sports team jerseys or school uniforms do). But on the other hand, clothing can function to accentuate the boundaries between us (like expensive brand names that only some can afford to wear). I thought about the ways that some people have way too much clothing in their closets while others lack this basic material need. I thought about who makes the clothing I wear, and whether my consumerist choices contribute to unfair labor practices (the answer, it turns out, is they do). I thought about what it would mean, then, to buy clothes differently, wear clothes differently, live differently as one who is clothed by God...

The image of God as one who clothes us raises *all kinds* of important questions for us to consider as people of faith, and I hope you'll have the chance to ponder some of them throughout our worship today and in the week to come. But today our worship is focused less on clothing, and more on the God who creates it, like a weaver or knitter or quilter. As we explore some of this imagery tonight through scripture and reflection, music and art, I invite you to open yourselves to experiencing the God who clothes us, the God who dwells among us, the God who indeed, is as close to us right now as our very clothing. And I invite you, as Sallie McFague says, to be both shocked by this metaphor *and* shocked by its familiarity (there is, perhaps, not another

biblical image of God as common as clothing) as we continue this Advent exploration, and as we seek to encounter God Emmanuel.

Source: Winner, Lauren. *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire and other overlooked ways of meeting God* (New York: HaepOne, 2019)

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Let us confess our sins together and hear the God's promise of forgiveness as we read responsively:

Leader: For rejecting the clothing of compassion, humility, generosity, and love that you give us,

All: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: For clothing ourselves in greed, selfishness, pride, and indifference instead,

A: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: For envying what others wear,

A: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: For failing to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, and visit those in prison,

A: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: For disentangling and distancing ourselves from our neighbors with whom you created us to be connected.

A: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: For our unwillingness to see your image in each other.

A: God who clothes and covers us, have mercy on us.

L: God is abundant in mercy and God's forgiveness covers all of our sin. Put on the garments of salvation and the robes of righteousness. In name of +Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Clothed in Christ, live now in the joy and the freedom of Christ.

A: Amen!

LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

MUSIC **Bring Many Names**

Bring many names
Beautiful and good,
Celebrate in parable and story.
Holiness in glory,
Living, loving God.
Hail and hosanna!
Bring many names.

God with us,
Christ, Emmanuel,
Soon a babe incarnate in a manger.
While we wait your coming,
be with us now.
Hail and hosanna!
Bring many names.

Great living God
Never fully known.
Joyful darkness,
far beyond our seeing.
Closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home.
Hail and hosanna!
Bring many names.

God who sends us forth
Into the world,
Help us see your image in each other.
Open us up to
seeing you a-new.
Hail and hosanna!
Bring many names.

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. And also with you.

Let us pray . . . **Weaver God, you clothe us in garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. Fashioned in your image and clothed in your love, empower us to see your image in each other and to clothe our neighbors in need. We pray in the name of the God of many names, Amen.**

READING: Psalm 139:13-18

- ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
- ¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

READING: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

- ¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
- ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
- ³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
- ⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
- ⁸For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
- ⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations,

and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

MUSIC #245 Creator of the Stars of Night

Creator of the stars of night,
your people's everlasting light,
O Christ, redeemer of us all,
we pray you hear us when we call.

When this old world drew on toward night,
you came; but not in splendor bright,
not as a monarch, but the child
of Mary, blessed mother mild.

Creator, be our loom on earth;
Your thread to frame our living worth;
Jesus, our warp and weft, come near;
And join us in our fabric here.

To God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Spirit Three in One,
praise, honor, might, and glory be,
from age to age eternally. Amen.

REFLECTION I Rev. Ali Tranvik

Some of us may be particularly familiar with the imagery in our worship service today. As I continue to get to know you all, I've learned that many of you weave and knit and cross-stitch and quilt. We have a prayer shawl ministry here at Cross of Glory—beautiful shawls that are crocheted by our members and then given to people at birth and death, wrapped around the sick or the grieving. We've got a few of those on display in our sanctuary today. There's also an incredible quilting ministry based at Cross of Glory, where over 40 quilters gather on Mondays mornings (in non-pandemic times) to quilt blankets and children's clothing. While most of those garments have already been donated to CEAP this year, we're grateful to have a few of them displayed in our sanctuary today as well.

Others of us, though, may not have an artistic bone in our body (full disclosure: I am much more in this category). So in order to learn more about what it might mean that we have a God who clothes us, I called up a few people this past week who told me a bit more about their craft. Within our own congregation, I spoke with a clothing designer who so beautifully told me about her work of clothing others, and from her I learned about the amount of time, tenderness, attention to detail, creativity, and care that is required in making a garment. I spoke with a quilter, who told me how she loves to create with scraps, creating something beautiful and useful and new out of something others have thrown away.

The business of garment-making comes in many forms: designing, sewing, tailoring, quilting, cross-stitching, crocheting, knitting, and so on. But in biblical times, the closest equivalent is weaving, so that's the image I want to invite us to take a closer look at today. I spoke with a weaver too, and I want to share with you a bit about the process of weaving that she shared with me.

Weaving, she said, is a long and laborious task. There is much the weaver must do before even sitting down at the loom. The weaver first must choose the type of yarn or thread she'll use, considering texture, running her fingers across yarn that is thick and hard-wearing, or along threads that are soft and smooth; yarn that is loosely spun and thread that is tight and fine. Once the weaver has selected the textured material she'll use, she begins to sketch a design for the garment, planning its size and shape, its pattern, and its many colors. While these days stores sell all sorts of colored yarn, in biblical times, weavers would need to dye the thread in order to create the desired colors. Dying thread is a process that is both mathematical and messy, requiring careful planning as well as patience when dye spills or splashes, and stains the hands of the weaver. The weaver would dye threads of all colors—deep browns and bright blues, dark golds and soft grays, hues and pigments of every shade. Once the thread is dyed and dried, the weaver would finally be ready to thread the loom, first stretching and attaching the vertical threads called the warp, and then beginning to weave the horizontal threads called the weft, back and forth between the warp. As the weaver begins these familiar and rhythmic strokes at the loom, she cannot let her attention stray for a second. Each individual stitch requires constant concentration. If one stitch is out of place, the entire tapestry is affected.

Finally, when the garment is finished, the weaver's job is not. Fabric tears. Stitches unravel. The garment's ends become worn and frayed. The weaver, therefore, is always patching, always repairing and restoring and reforming, always creating and re-creating—always restless.

MUSIC Restless Weaver *Sung to the Tune of Lord Whose Love in Humble Service (#712)*

Restless Weaver, ever spinning threads of justice and shalom,
dreaming patterns of creation where all creatures find a home,
gathering up life's varied fibers – every texture, every hue:
grant us your creative vision. With us weave your world anew.

Where earth's fragile web is raveling help us mend each broken strand.
Bless our urgent, bold endeavors cleansing water, air, and land.
Through the Spirit's inspiration – offering health where once was pain,
strengthen us to be the stewards of your world knit whole again.

When our violent lust for power ends in lives abused and torn,
from compassion's sturdy fabric fashion hope and trust reborn.
Where injustice rules as tyrant, give us courage, God, to dare
live our dreams of transformation. Make our lives incarnate prayer.

Restless Weaver, still conceiving new life – now and yet to be.
Binding all your vast creation in one living tapestry.
You have called us to be weavers. Let your love guide all we do.
With your reign of peace our pattern, help us weave your world anew.

REFLECTION II Rev. Ali Tranvik

With each of these images in Advent, we are invited to ask not only what this image tells us about God, but also what this image says about *us*, as people made in the image of God.

If God is one who clothes, as our text from Isaiah suggests, then we are ones who are clothed. If God is knitter, as our text from Psalm 139 suggests, then we are knitted. If God is sewer, we are sown. If God is quilter, we are quilted. If God is weaver, we are woven. You get the idea.

Here's another possible way of thinking about it: if God is garment-maker, then we—God's creation—are part of that garment, each of us a single stitch in the grand fabric of creation. I, Ali,

am one stitch. You (Barb, Chad, Gayle, Judy, Erik, Johnetta, Earl, Audrey, Milo, Deb, Dan... all of you!) are each a single stitch.

Hang with me as we keep playing this metaphor out for a minute. In a garment, each stitch is connected to every other—not just to those immediately nearby but also to stitches far from the “center,” stitches seemingly at the “borders,” or even beyond them, right? Each stitch is part of the same whole. If that’s the case, then we too—as individual stitches—are connected to every other, those near us and those far away. Those we see and those we don’t. Those we want to be connected with, and those we may not. We too are part of the same whole.

I must admit, this metaphor runs quite counter to the way I usually see myself. I tend to focus on my family, my work, my past, my future. My own stitch, and the small piece of fabric that most immediately surrounds it, dominates my field of vision. To put it differently, I’m almost always “zoomed in,” focused on that part of the fabric that seems like it’s “mine.” Even more than that, I see my stitch, the substance of who I am, as *mine*. I see myself as if I wasn’t woven, but as something that I made and remake. And when I am zoomed in, I can’t see the other stitches—the other parts of creation. I can’t see that they are part of the same fabric. I can’t see that I am connected to them, inextricably bound up with them, made by the same weaver, and part of the same fabric.

What would it mean for me to zoom out, to see the whole garment that God is creating, as God-the-Weaver sees it?

MUSIC Bind Us Together

Refrain

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord, bind us together,
Bind us together with love.

There is only one God,
There is only one King;
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing: ***Refrain***

Made for the glory of God,
Marked with the cross of his Son,
Born with the gift to be free,
For Jesus the victory has won. ***Refrain***

We are the family of God,
We are the promise divine;
We are God's chosen desire,
We are the glorious new wine. ***Refrain***

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

The spirit of the Lord God is upon us, Isaiah reminds us. Let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

God who clothes us, we pray for all those whose clothing feels frayed, tattered, or worn on this day. We pray especially for those who do not have enough clothing to keep warm this winter, for those who struggle with body image and eating disorders, those who labor to make clothing for unjust wages, for the weavers and quilters, seamstresses and tailors out of work due to the

pandemic. Clothe us all in your warmth, your comfort, and your love. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who weaves, bless all the people of Cross of Glory who so faithfully use their craft for the sake of the neighbor. We give you thanks especially for our quilting ministry and prayer shawl ministry. And we give you thanks for the colorful tapestry of faith communities who share in our life together--for our friends at Faith Healing, for our fellow Wildfire congregations, our Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu brothers and sisters in Brooklyn Center, for worshipping communities across the world. Bind us all together in your love. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who loves justice, you call us to "bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners." Be present with those who are oppressed, and empower us to work for justice within our communities, that newly-arrived refugees would experience welcome, that students would have opportunities to learn and grow despite the challenges of distance-learning, that the sick and uninsured would have access to affordable healthcare, that the unsheltered would find safe housing, that the hungry would have access to nutritious food. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who creates, you have created the stars of night, woven together the trees of the forests, designed the beauty of the birds that rest in their branches, and knit each one of us in our mother's womb. We give you thanks for the fearfully- and wonderfully-made gifts of your creation. As we look for your image this Advent season, help us to notice your handiwork in the world around us, and to care for it with the love that you have crafted it with. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God-with-us, we give you thanks for the ways thank you presence breaks forth into our weary world, for the ways that you meet us in our grief, our loneliness, our fear, and our pain. Draw near to all those in special need of our loving care today. We pray especially for Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, Vicky Jacobson, Claudia Reitan, Jeannie Kuzmich, John Thomson, for the Balzer family at the Covid diagnosis of Lori's nephew and sister, for Nancy and Dave Hengel at the recently surgery of their daughter, and for the family of Arlene Kosek at the death of her cousin as a result of Covid. "Give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning." Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As we watch and wait for you, we lift before you these prayers, and those that remain in the depths of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

And now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

ART REFLECTION

BLESSING

As we prepare for God incarnate to come into our world this Advent season, may the God who is already with us, Emmanuel, surprise you with his presence and as you go forth. **Amen**

SENDING SONG #239 Hark, the Glad Sound verses 1, 3 and 4

- 1 Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes,
the Savior promised long;
let ev'ry heart prepare a throne
and ev'ry voice a song.
- 3 He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.
- 4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heav'n's eternal fabric sings
of your beloved name.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace in the name of our weaving God.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

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Worship Leadership:

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Pianist, vocalist: Mark Trease
Vocalist, choir director: Keith Williams
Lector: Dawn Bailey
Acolyte: Earl Simons
Tech Director: Ryan Bailey
Ministers: The people of Cross of Glory

We invite you to make an offering by sending a check to the church or by visiting our new, secure online giving page which can be found at the bottom of our home page: www.crossofglory.us Thanks for your support!

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