

- **<image of God>**

News report: September 10, 2015. Australia.

Katherine and her family lived in eight different homes, her father was a violent drunk who beat her mother, her brothers and her. He controlled her money, where she went, what she wore and who she spoke to every minute of every day and she was just 12 when she was first raped by him.

“I thought that was normal,” she said. “I wanted to die, I had no support from anybody...

At 25, she had a son to her father, at 27 a miscarriage, at 31 another miscarriage, at 33 another son, at 35 another son and at 36 a daughter who died after 12 weeks.

...she reported her father and the abuse to social workers and the police 22 times and nothing was done to help her.

Finally a country police officer took Katherine seriously, and after conducting DNA tests realised the horrible truth.

Her father was arrested and charged to the Victorian County Court with 83 separate offences. One charge alone contained 700 counts of rape. He was sentenced to 22 years behind bars.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/she-was-held-captive-by-her-father-for-30-years-and-suffered-horrendous-abuse-now-shes-speaking-out/news-story/16fbe7a5fa2040932b61c70ecb999221>

It's so utterly disturbing and horrifying when these things happen. It's upsetting. It's not right. I find these stories just about the worse I can bear hearing. What is it that makes them so disturbing and offensive to us?

For me, it's because of the contrast of these words from Genesis 1:

- **26Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...**

God made us in his image. When we hear of people like Katherine being treated so terribly, it disturbs us because people are such a **special** part of God's creation.

For every other part of creation, we hear the phrases: “And God said...let there be, let there be. Let the water team, let the land produce...

But when it comes to the creation of humanity, the language shifts:

“Then God said, “Let us””

- **This is personal.**

Then God said: this is personal. Let us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all there in the beginning, all together as one, let **us** make mankind in **our** image.

Humanity is made in the image of a God of relationship. A God who is not only in a relationship with us, but also in a relationship with himself – he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He IS a relationship. So we are created as relational beings. Just like God.

And so when we hear these terrible stories of what people do to people, it upsets us because it upsets the very purpose and design of our creation as humanity. When **people made in the image of God** are destroying others **made in the image of God**, we’re not just upset because of what this poor woman went through. We’re upset because another human did this to her! A human like us. Made in the same image as us.

When God finished creating humanity, it says:

- **31God saw all that he had made, and it was very good**

It was **very** good.

Made in the image of God, humanity turns a good creation into a very good creation. Because humanity **completes** creation. We are the pinnacle of creation. We are the **crowning glory** of God’s creation.

Imagine you’re building your own house. You might look at the land you’re building on and say “This is good land!” You look at the plans and say: “These are good plans!” And while it’s being built, you might say: “this building work is good”. And when the house is all finished, you stand back and look at the whole thing and say “this is good!” But then you move in. And you say: “This is **very** good!” Why is it now “very” good? When people move into the house, the **good** house becomes a “**very** good” home because it is fulfilling its **purpose** for being built.

And what do you do then? You stop building, and you rest. And that’s exactly what God does in 2:2. He stands back and looks at it all, with man and woman “moved in”, and it is VERY good. Because it’s finished. It’s complete. And it’s being lived in – it’s fulfilling its purpose. And God can finally rest from creating.

In Genesis 1, God creates a world with a plan, an order, a purpose, AND a relationship. But in the whole of creation, **we** are the ones created in his image. **We** are the ones he speaks to. And **we** are the ones he relates to personally through Jesus. Jesus didn’t come to earth as a plant, or as a rabbit, or as a glass of water- he came as a human, in the image of God.

And to reflect that, humans are given a special place and purpose in creation.

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

We are to be fruitful, increase in number and fill the earth. But we are also to subdue the earth. To rule over every living creature.

- **We are made UNDER God’s rule, but OVER his creation.**

We are under His authority, but he’s given us the responsibility to “rule” and “subdue”. **Not** to do whatever we like. But to manage and look after. It’s not a position of authority to do what we feel like, but a position of privilege and responsibility to do God’s will.

And this is the heart of Genesis – God creates us differently to the rest of creation. He makes us in his image to be in a special relationship with **him** and with the rest of creation. We are under His rule, but he’s given us a position of privilege and responsibility.

So we need to ask ourselves – as creatures made in the image of God – how do we treat God’s creation? The earth? Other people? Ourselves?

< environment >

Think about the way we care for our world – God has put the earth in front of you and said “look after this for me. Be the caretaker of my creation that you were made to be.” And as image bearers of God, we should take that seriously. We should take responsibility. **BE** responsible. The way we use plastic bags, fossil fuels – these are things we must take seriously, as caretakers of God’s world.

< people >

But even more important than the earth itself, is the way we treat other people. God has put people in front of you and said “look after this person – they’re like you, they’re like ME. You share the same image.” Care for the people of this world as **brothers and sisters**. As part of your family. No racism, no sexism, no classism. The greatest of people, and the worst of sinners – **everyone** is made in the same image of the same God.

Friday was national sorry day. It’s a time when we should reflect on the way indigenous people have been treated in Australia over the last 230 years. It’s a good time to reflect on how we treat **all** people from different **backgrounds and cultures**. Friday was also the beginning of Ramadan. It’s a time to think about how we treat people from other **faiths**. How do we treat Muslims? Do we pray for them? Do we care for them? Do we love them as image bearers of God?

<character >

We've just been through another dramatic week of terror in Manchester. Reflect on this – how do we treat the people who did this? They are ALSO image bearers of God. Do we pray for them? Do we love them? No matter what we think, we are all **equally** made in the image of God. ALL humans are image bearers of God. How do we show love, forgiveness, mercy, patience, kindness?

Let me finish today by telling you about Tom.

Tom was a young man at a church I attended. I asked him one day: "So how did you end up becoming a Christian?" I knew he had grown up in a cult, and it was pretty horrible. It deeply damaged his family. He escaped the cult, but because of that experience, he hated religion, especially Christianity.

But he told me how his **brother** had started going to our church. His brother had their first baby baptised there. Then he and his wife fell pregnant again and the whole church looked after them with meals and babysitting and clothes – right through the pregnancy and afterwards. And he told me how he watched this happening. He said "I just saw how the church cared for my brother and his family. And it changed me. It made me realise how much Christians really genuinely loved people."

What he saw was **people made in the image of God** looking after **other people made in the image of God**. He saw a reflection of God in the people of that church. He saw people treated the way they should be.

I don't want us to reduce these verses to saying we should care for the environment, or that we should be involved in social justice. We should. These are good things. But there is MUCH more to this. We ALL **bear** the image of God. And our desire should be the same as God's desire – to see all people come into a relationship with God through Jesus. Why? **Because** all people bear God's image, and **need** God in their life.

Care for the environment. Care for all people. But more than this – **reflect** the image of your creator.

Let's pray.

26Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27So God created mankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

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

29Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

31God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.