

**“Moral Imagination”**  
**July 10, 2011**  
**Grove Presbyterian Church**

**Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”**

**God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.**

**God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.**

Made in the image of God. Pretty cool.

This however doesn't mean God is some gray haired fellow with paunch, big moustache, and spasmodic face. Fortunately.

Neither male nor female  
Not bipedal  
Not even physical  
Not even a being

Being itself  
The essence of being-ness  
Not a being. Not creature, creator. Source for all.  
Nor a noun but the divine verb.  
The unlimited being-ness of pure goodness, pure love, pure truth, pure justice, pure beauty, pure blessedness, pure mercy. This – which sounds modern – is how they described God in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

*I. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek*

*him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.*

*II. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*

*-- Westminster Confession of Faith*

So, ‘in the image’ means nothing about physique and everything about potential.

Fortunately.

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Just to ferment up the brain cells and bubble up some of that divine potential, we offer today a few brainteasers and mind stretchers. Loosen up those synapses and stimulate independent creative thinking.

Can you add to the list of homophones (sound alike, different spellings, different meanings; such as: which witch)? Homographs (same sound, same spelling, different meanings; such as: trunk of tree, pack up my trunk)? Heteronyms (I really like these – different sound, same spelling, different meaning; such as row a boat, cause a row)?

Without googling or otherwise cheating?

Brain power only!

- ▲ How can you turn a glass of water upside down without spilling the water?
- ▲ What will computers be like two generations from now?
- ▲ Why are 1898 silver dollars worth more than 1897 silver dollars? Why?  
Because there is one more of them!

Let loose the imagination! We can take any problem and imagine at least a dozen ways to solve it.

When they decided they wanted to build a Suspension Bridge over the Niagara Falls, they couldn’t figure out how to get the cable across the wide, turbulent gorge. Shoot a cannon ball? Tow the cable across on a steamer? Shoot a rocket? Then the engineer’s intellectual yeast fermented: he decided to award \$5 to the first boy who could fly a kite across the gorge. The boy who succeeded was 16-year-old Homan Walsh who crossed the river by ferry upstream and launched his kite from the Canadian side, with the wind at

his back. Then a heavier line was attached to the kite string and pulled across, followed by succeeding heavier lines until the main cable.

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With all the problems we have to solve these days, couldn't we use a little more creative, independent thinking driving us through daily life, like the earth through space, by a iron core of moral beliefs?

Or is there too much a deadly diet of organized sports, organized schedules, organized play dates – kids always told what to do, where to do it, how to do it, when to do it?

Too much a starched diet of standardized testing, standardized slogans, standardized answers, standardized stories?

Ready-made answers are as delicious as being force fed cans of Ensure.

A professor at a nearby college sighed when she told me recently how she had trouble grading the term papers her students submitted. Not one of them bothered to paginate the papers. The professor asked them why didn't they. To a student, they answered that she didn't tell them to number the pages. It wasn't in her instructions.

I mean, it's not even a matter of hoping they'll go the extra mile. Why do we have to tell people to do the normal?

I know why. We've trained them to be dependent. They like being pets. They like others being responsible for their success and their happiness.

You might be surprised at how our culture has rewritten 99% of the classic fairy tales so that they – like TV Sit-Coms -- always have a happy ending.

Try reading the originals. The Pig who built his house of brick kills the wolf. The Little Mermaid chooses death rather than stabbing to death the Prince she loved.

Since when does life always have a happy ending?

This hazard is something we are examining more carefully here at Grove as we evaluate how we teach the Bible. Our Director of Christian Education brought to our attention that we should take care how much of children's religious literature can actually harm and mislead children about Bible stories.

We came across this at the end of last spring when we were reading the Book of Jonah. Jonah the prophet was a royal pain to God. Jonah tried to run away from God. Jonah pouted and whined when God decided to love and forgive a nation Jonah hated. Jonah's a bad man. So how come half of the children's books paint him as heroic?

Bad teaching, false stories, sappy stories, can imprint conclusions about what we would rather they believe, rather than tell the real story and let them hook into it and pull out meaning for themselves. Worse, we damage our children when we supply visuals at an age before they have the faculties to process the message.

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Could the other hazard be that we are cleverer than ever before, but without the moral measure, the moral core? Clever but not terribly smart. Intelligence never is enough. We may be intelligent enough to know how to build a car. Intelligent enough to know how to drive a car. But not smart enough to know you don't drive a car 180 miles an hour after drinking all night.

Jesus himself, first born in the image of God, is the master of a creative moral imagination.

Listen:

**You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Made in the image: it means the ability to imagine, to create, this divine potential to be divine enough to truly love, to have reached this end, this *teleios* of fulfillment, this perfection as wholeness, completeness.

We humans are more than mere animals trapped by instinct and appetite, more than grunting beasts lacking self-awareness, lacking self-reflection.

Because of the verb-ness of God we can rise above base nature and are free to imagine what will be humane and beneficial and what would be demeaning and cruel.

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For instance, there is Art and Beauty that endures versus what a witty Nun once termed newspaper art. It is all art, but some art endures the ages, whilst some last until you need to put something down on the bottom of the birdcage:

- ▲ Rembrandt or graffiti scribblers?
- ▲ Michelangelo or Andy Warhol?
- ▲ Shakespeare or bloggers?

- ▲ Those who reach for the stars or those who sit on the couch and eat potato chips all day?

We are what we pay attention to.

Made in the image: given the gift to create that which is Godly and good. You enter time itself born with Godly purpose. There is moral direction, a moral goodness, to this dominion. God is not some object but the very Subject of our living. The compelling, liberating force. Our souls are the needle of the compass pulled by this divine magnet, called toward, drawn toward that which is perfect, that which is whole, that which is fulfilling.

Made in the image: it means the ability to differentiate between that which is negative and which is positive. To project that which cheapens and degrades and that which ennobles and inspires. To create that which benefits as opposed to those who create something for the sake of being clever, or in an attempt to one-up someone else, and then step back and say, "Uh oh, what have we just done?"

- ▲ mustard gas versus Polio vaccines
- ▲ Penthouse magazine versus Renoir

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This is why we here choose to pay attention to Jesus. He reveals what is true. Jesus himself is the master of creative thinking. Exploding practiced assumptions. Don't fence me in. For him, the freedom of love is more than an 'either/or.' More than quid pro quo love, something for something love. That's easy. The imagination of loving means loving your enemies too.

Answering 'yes' when they want you to answer multi-choice questionnaires.

Answering 'love' when they want you to enforce the law.

How do you do? New wineskins for new wine.

They tried their best to get Jesus to conform to their script, but how do you rewrite the very Word of God? They tried their best to stuff Jesus in a box. But out he pops, like a Jack-in-the-box.

For He reveals to us how to free ourselves from the beast and become what we were meant to be from the very beginning: perfected humans -- fully flesh and fully spiritual, fully made in the perfect image of God. And that is very good.

## Homophones (a type of Homonym)

Sound alike      Different meanings      Different spellings

--- please, without using the computer ---

Which witch sum some plait plate shoo shoe wain wane pane pain queue cue sees seas seize beer bier bee be lye lie dye die wee we or ore oar awl all more moor tee tea tie tye wry rye fair fare faire sole soul to too two mould mold due do dew fate fete plain plane Dane deign heal heel lane lain wheel weal sane Seine bell belle seem seam shore sure site sight main mane Maine cane Cain by bye oh owe roe row flower flour pique peak peek boar bore board bored rain reign fore for four boat bote ware wear where faze phase real reel root route rout route flu flew break brake sow so sew moose mousse pare pear mask masque here hear hire higher sale sail wood would rood rude pour pore poor bough bow lead led white wight made maid bear bare red read stele steal steel loan lone duel dual bear bare wile while dough doe sewer sue-er woe whoa style stile curt Kurt Kay cay Mae may Mick's mix whose who's Jules jewels Hugh hew hue Stu stew seen scene plum plumb lie lye waist waste lode load sail sale leek leak gin djinn your yore you're their there they're but butt sore soar bawl ball maul mall hail hale bale bail tail tale wale wail male mail pale pail mote moat liar lyre need knead knight night know no knew new Gail gale Erin Aaron Mary marry wane wain its it's tolled told right wright write Styx sticks meat mete shown shone hi high hie hie hey hay page Paige Blair blare beryl barrel great grate team team hart heart bred bread flee flea faint feint blew blue peel peal won one sewn sown sweet suite tow toe fowl foul lam lamb ton tun quire choir roll role steak stake metal mettle in inn time thyme troop troupe taught taut hoard horde cell sell rode road sine sign hair hare stair stare way weigh eye I raze raise slay sleigh days daze ate eight sun son

## Time for Riddles and Mind Stretchers...

1. How many ways you can cook vegetables?
2. Name all the different types of arcs...
3. Name all the yellow fruit there are...
4. What does the sun look like from Pluto?
5. What will replace computers as we know them?
6. If you could go back to one day in your life and relive it, which day would it be?
7. How do they get those model ships inside the bottle?
8. Which weighs more, a pound of feathers or a pound of gold?
9. How many birth days does the average man have?
10. How can you turn a glass of water upside down without spilling the water?
11. Balance a quarter on the edge of a dollar bill.
12. Arrange ten pennies like bowling pins. You can only move three pennies to make the pyramid point in the opposite direction.
13. Why are 1898 silver dollars worth more than 1897 silver dollars?

