

Sermon Series: Philippians -- Good News

March 16, 2014

Title: Creator's Journey

Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Summary: How to fix a marred and defaced Creation? Paul takes us on the Creator's Journey to show us not only how Jesus restored God's Image, but how you and I become an integral part of God's work of restoration.

The Marred Image

Pieta:

On May 21, 1972 a mentally deranged geologist named Laszlo Toth walked into St. Peter's Basilica, jumped the barrier protecting Michelangelo's Pieta, and rained down 12 blows with his geologist's hammer, all the while shouting, "I am Jesus Christ!" When he was finished, more than 100 fragments of the statue lay scattered on the floor of the basilica. Bystanders, at first dumbfounded by the desecration of the priceless work of art, proceeded to scoop up souvenirs. Some would later be returned; many would not.

The Pieta, Michelangelo's depiction of Mary cradling the body of the crucified Jesus, had been carved from a single block of Carrerra marble over a two year period, beginning in 1498. Michelangelo was not yet 25 years old when he completed his masterpiece. Now, Mary's nose had been broken off; her eye had been defaced. A hand and her left arm had been smashed to pieces. 30 seconds of insanity had done what 473 years of tumultuous European history had never done. Michelangelo's work was disastrously marred.

To restore or not to restore?

So what to do with a defaced and ruined statue?

The debate of what to do with the statue focused on three options:

- Leave it just as it was as a testament to the violence of the times.
- Restore it, but mark with lines where the damage had occurred.
- Undertake an "integral restoration," which would not leave so much as a trace of the damage visible to the naked eye.

In the end, the decision was made to pursue "integral restoration." The fragments that the restorers had in hand were painstakingly put back in place. One such fragment arrived from the United States, sent back by a tourist with a guilty conscience! Mary's nose was reconstructed from a block of marble taken from her back. 10 months later, the Pieta was completely restored, and now resides behind bullet-proof glass.

The marred image:

The broken face of Michelangelo's Mary is mute testament to the marred image of God that each one of us bears. Paul sums up the matter this way:

Romans 3:23 NIV

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Michelangelo's Pieta is an irrefutable testimony to the genius and skill of its sculptor. In fact, it is the only piece of sculpture that Michelangelo ever signed! You are God's masterpiece, created lovingly by Him, and signed with His own Name. But like the Pieta, we have been marred by the evil of this world. We are God's handiwork, but we and our world are in desperate need of "integral restoration."

Creator's Journey

Who qualifies as a restorer?

Think of what the qualifications must have been for conducting the full restoration of the Pieta! A restorer would need to:

- Know exactly what the statue looked like before it was defaced
- Be fully committed to bringing it back to the original artist's vision
- Be skilled in handling the materials, even to the point of "recycling" marble from the back of the statue of Mary to the front!
- Be willing to "enter into the brokenness" of the statue's marred condition, and work forward to restoration

Paul describes Jesus as the only one qualified to serve as the Restorer of God's Image in broken humanity. He quotes a hymn that tells the story of the Creator's Journey of restoration. It begins with these words:

Philippians 2:6 NIV

**Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;**

Jesus was, and is, the exact image of God. Paul writes to the Colossians:

Colossians 1:15-16 NIV

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Jesus not only knows what we're supposed to be like; He Himself is "the image of the invisible God." He is the template for us all. What's more, He is the One through Whom God created the cosmos and all that is in it. That means that He knows how to put us back together!

Jesus alone qualifies as the Restorer of God's Image.

Entering the brokenness:

It takes more than skill and love of ancient statuary to make a good restorer. The restorer must be willing to "enter the brokenness." He or she must be willing to work not with the perfection of the original, but with the fragments, embracing as it were the hammer blows of the destroyer. It is not enough to hate the destruction or even the person who did it. Each act of destruction must be understood before it can be undone. That means being willing to recreate the violence, to accept it, to say, "He must have held the hammer this way, swung it from here, and hit the statue in this spot. Only then can you truly understand how to fix the damage.

That is what Jesus did for you and me. He entered into our brokenness. Paul writes:

Philippians 2:7-8 NIV

**rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death —
even death on a cross!**

In verse 6 Paul said that Jesus was "in very nature God." Paul actually uses the Greek word *morphe*, which means "form." Thus he says that Jesus was "in God's form." Paul uses this same term again in verse 7, now saying that Jesus took on "the form of a slave."

Jesus didn't cease to be God; instead, God Himself in Jesus entered into the lowest possible category of humanity for that time. You could go no lower than "the form of a slave." To be a slave meant to have absolutely no autonomy, no status, no identity other than that of your master.

And then Jesus went on to die the death reserved for slaves and criminals: crucifixion. He humbled Himself -- God humbled Himself -- to a violent, image-marring death, one designed to utterly dehumanize the victim before he left this world. Jesus embraced this fate. He said that it was His own decision to "lay down His life." Jesus embraced our brokenness.

As Paul puts it:

2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Restored Image:

On Easter morning Jesus stepped out of the Garden Tomb -- God's restoration work complete. The Creator, who had entered our brokenness, had undone the destruction of evil and death. And now the Father restored His Son to His rightful place:

Philippians 2:9-11 NIV

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is what God's Image looks like in its restored glory. Jesus took the Creator's Journey into God's marred and defaced Creation. He embraced the sin and brokenness, even to the point of a slave's tortured death. And then He unwound every tentacle of evil, healed every hammer blow of destruction, reversed every process of Death itself. He alone is worthy of worship. He alone is Lord of all. He alone has authority to sign His handiwork with His Name.

Restoration

Called to restore:

Paul tells the story of Jesus at this point in his letter for a very important reason -- one that reaches all the way to you and me. He does so because Jesus gave to us the work of continuing the restoration of God's Image in our places and in our time. Jesus promised to empower us with His own Spirit so that we could be His restoration agents in our world.

Being a follower of Jesus means not only being part of God's New Creation; it means dedicating ourselves to being restorers of that Creation. It means so loving God's handiwork that we are willing to embrace the brokenness around us, laying ourselves and our agendas down for others.

Prerequisites:

So what does it take to be a restorer of God's Creation. Listen to how Paul puts it:

Philippians 2:1-5 NIV

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

We are to become "one" with Jesus, the Restorer. Notice the prerequisites for being a restorer of God's broken image:

- Encouraged from being united with King Jesus
- Experiencing and sharing the comfort of His love
- Sharing in His Spirit
- Tenderness and compassion
- Not self-focused or conceited
- Humility
- Valuing others above ourselves
- Looking out for interests of others

Think about those people who so patiently restored Michelangelo's Pieta for 10 long months. To do their job they had to in a sense "be united" with the artists. They had to learn to share his love for his creation. They had to be willing to lovingly put back together what an act of mindless violence had destroyed. They had to be humble enough to not make the project about themselves. The goal: restore the statue so completely that no one would even know they had ever touched it!

Restoration:

Isn't that our job in this messy and unfair world? How tempting to immortalize an act of abuse or violence against us. "Don't fix the damage! Leave it as a sign of the violence and injustice of our world." Isn't that what happens when we refuse to forgive and choose to be the victim?

But God has called us to be His restorers of His Image in our world. The only way we can do that is by taking our eyes off ourselves and fixing them on Jesus. He alone can give us the power and the wisdom to join Him in putting the broken pieces back

together. And God has chosen to do that work through you. He invites you to join Him on the Creator's Journey!