

Canterbury United Methodist Church
New Traditions
September 25, 2016

Text: Genesis 1:26-27, 31a; Psalm 42: 1-3, 8-9a

Focus: The creation story in Genesis says that God made us in His image in the beginning, and we believe today that that part of us made in God's likeness is what we call our soul. God's imprint on us is the core of who we are...yet we cover that real self up with layers of false self designed to hide our imperfections and encourage acceptance by others.

Function: Use Richard Rohr's construct of true selves and false selves to point to where our real, authentic identity is...both as individuals but also as Canterbury. Begin to lay the groundwork for future adult spiritual growth by pointing out the willingness to change and to let go of the previous pattern of building the false self are the tough steps on the path toward spiritual growth. Our true selves show through when we can see God's image in the way we love and give to one another.

Prayer: Gracious and Almighty God, who binds the universe and all of Creation together with your spirit that we call love, we gather here this morning hoping to feel a sense of your spirit in this place. Our hearts are full of images of riots in our streets and so many words about political debates that some of us wonder where we are and where we are going. Calm our hearts and steady our spirits Lord with the reassurance your love still wins above all else, and that the path of our lives curves toward a return to You. We ask for the courage to live our lives within the image of Yourself that you placed within each of us at our origin, so that your love might be visible in all that we do. In the name of your son, Jesus, through whom we glimpse and feel your unconditional love...amen.

The Soul of Canterbury

1) Can you imagine how I felt, an old reformed banker...

- a) when I saw that the preaching topic for today was a touchy-feely subject called Soul-Keeping?
- b) I mean...I'm the kind of guy who likes his debits to equal his credits! I'm the kind of guy that can calculate loan payments and internal rates of return. You know...tangible, exact mathematical stuff...the realm of souls feels very foreign to that part of me.

- c) But I do think all of us realize that the way we make our living or what our academic background is is not who we really are...that the things that swirl around us everyday are not our identity...
- d) We may not think about it very much but each of us has a soul...did you know that when pilots file flight plans...that if they have 156 passengers and flight crew on board, like in the movie "Sully"...their flight plan will say they have 156 souls on board?

2) So what is your soul?

- a) If I were to ask twenty preachers to define what a person's soul is, I think I might get twenty different pretty technical and academic answers to that question. And they would all be opinions!
- b) The Buechner quote on the cover of your orders of worship speaks to how he sees our souls...he sees our souls as the image of God within us that acts as an inner source of healing, strength and insight for our lives, and I like that definition...
- c) I think most of us don't give our souls much thought, generally, in the rush and challenge of our lives. I think most of us think of our souls as the part of us that will be left after this life is over and we move to our next life, whatever that will be.
- d) If we think about our souls at all, we kind of think about them in a kind of future sense...something I'll need to worry about later...perhaps near the end of my life.
- e) But there are some exceptions: Just this week, I have learned about three friends who are taking care of their souls right now...one is gone off to Santa Fe for a week on her fiftieth birthday to think about where she is and who she is near the mid-point of her life...another who is younger goes to the beach by himself for three days every fall to clear his head and get rebalanced...another who is older goes to Cullman each year for a weekend spent in silent retreat at the Sacred Heart Monastery there.
- f) These folks are all responding to a feeling they have in their souls...each of them, in their own way, are sensing a need to cleanse their souls...to offload the pressures that they are bombarded with and to re-center themselves...remind themselves of who they really are...

3) So what is your soul, really?

- a) Richard Rohr, who is one of the people I read in order to grow in my faith, says this about our souls...
 - i) That within each of us lies the true self and the false self. The true self, he says, is what religion often calls the soul—your eternal essence...the you that God made you to be as you entered this world...the you that you will be as you leave this world.
 - ii) He says the false self is the personal you create for yourself. All of the ways you construct an outer façade in order to portray yourself to the world the way you want to be perceived. Most of us spend most of our lives building this false self...most of us have very elaborate and well constructed false selves. We do this sometimes consciously, but often subconsciously...we wall off and compartmentalize who we really are, and build a version of ourselves that we show to others that we think will be better.
- b) The problem is that we begin to think that our false selves are who we really are...the self importance and power of our title or our job...the flawless version of a spouse or a parent or a child...we begin to want to hide our flaws...keep other people from seeing them to protect our self-image that we are portraying to everyone else...and with every compartment we build...our real self gets more and more hidden.
- c) The way I think of this is that we are all mixed bags...partly good, but also partly bad...motivated by our own self-interests. We build our false selves to show an outer veneer of perfection...that we are all good. But the reality is the we are all flawed as humans
- d) Rohr has a simple test to determine whether you are operating out of your false self or your true self...he says that on those occasions when you find yourself being hurt or offended by something that someone else has said or done...that hurt you feel is coming from your false self. Something in the construction of how you've built your outside shell or persona has been hurt or challenged...
- e) When he is asked how do we get to that true self, he says we have to be willing to let go of our false selves...something that is very hard to do because we have to be willing to:
 - i) Let go of our carefully constructed outside persona designed to curry the approval and favor of those around us...

- ii) To change by being willing to live as God made us, in our true selves,
- iii) And then be willing to grow closer to the God who made us by being authentic to who we were made to be...

4) I think there is a spiritual hunger here at Canterbury...

- a) And I think it's because we've been feeding our souls with the equivalent of spiritual junk food...
- b) I think some of us feed our souls with email forwards that express outrage with something that's going on in our country...
- c) I think some of us feed our souls with a heaping helping of Fox News or MSNBC, according to what sounds right to us...
- d) I think some of us feed our souls with hours of FaceBook or Twitter, keeping track of what everyone we are connected to thinks or does...
- e) All of that stuff goes in and what does that do to us? Does it give us hearts that are closer to God? Does it give us greater compassion and caring for those around us? Can we see any of God's image in all of that?

5) I've been thinking lately about the soul of Canterbury...

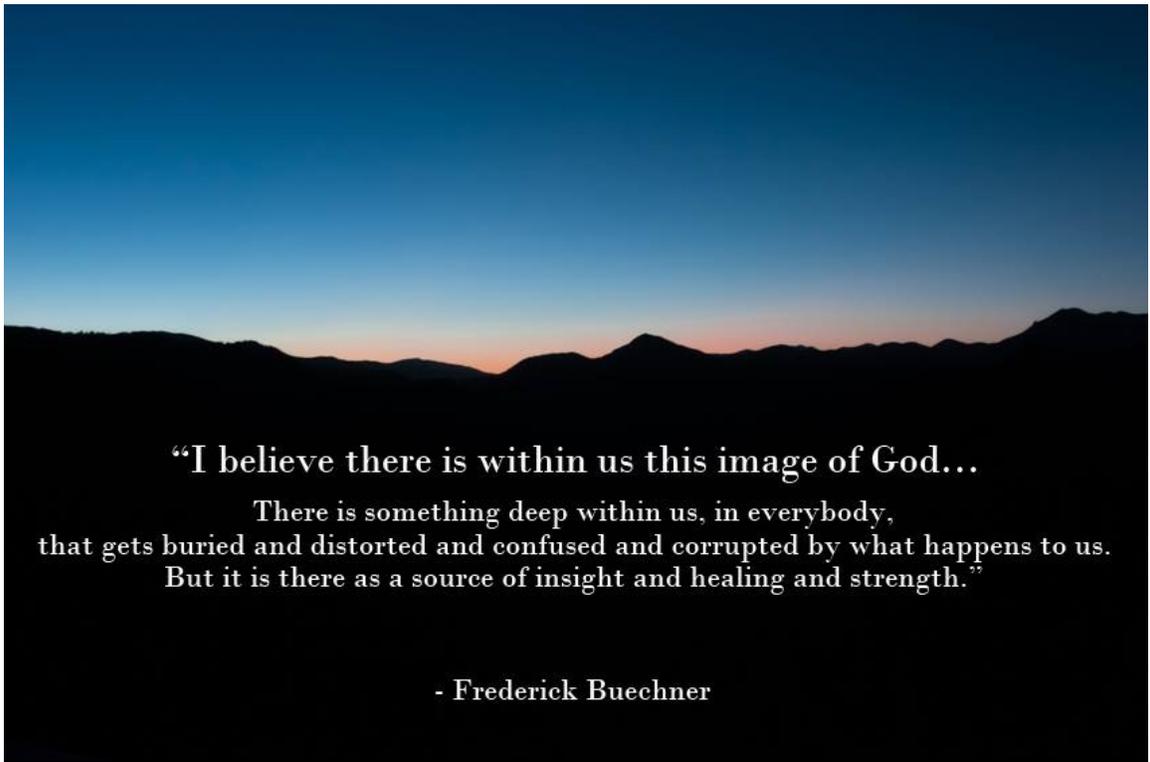
- a) What is it? Where do we see examples of God's image...of what Canterbury's true self is?
- b) I think if you are willing to look around...there are many examples...Brown Bag...Avondale Samaritan Place...Stop Hunger Now...the new Encore program...all of these reveal the true giving and generous nature of the women and men of Canterbury, I think...but
- c) Let me tell about another one I saw recently...I am friends with some younger men who were interested in forming a small group of men in their thirties and forties, right in the challenging years of beginning and raising families, right in the middle of growing careers...the time of life when it feels like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders...
- d) When these men talk about where they are...they talk about being spiritually hungry...of being sure that there is something more than what they are getting...and they want to look for it...they want to look for their true selves.

- e) Their schedules were such that early Friday morning worked for them and I came to the church early one Friday morning to help them find a room. I went first to the Canterbury Conference Room...nope, it was full and in use of young men in their twenties and thirties engaged in a Bible study...I went next to the Renneker Conference room and found it in use...these men were in their forties with a little older families, all engaged in study and discussion.
- f) We wound up in the Pathways classroom with the men that I was with and after an hour, the younger men emerged from their discussions to go to work for the day, and were met by a team of older men, moving carts full of brown bags into position so that they could be given away to those who are hungry.
- g) And it just struck me...this is a picture of who we really are...this is a little snapshot of us living out God's image in us...younger men searching for truth and substance in God's house...older men living out the generosity of God's spirit by giving to others as we give to ourselves.

6) And so....

- a) The question for you here today is one that John Wesley used: "How is it with your soul? And how are you taking care of your soul?"
- b) Let me close with these words from Richard Rohr...
 - i) "...on the path that God is leading you on, the journey you are going through, the burdens that you are bearing...all of these are combining to create the precise chemistry of your soul...and in the eternal scheme of things, you discover that all God wants from you is you..."
 - ii) "All I can give back to God is who I really and full am! That is all God wants."
- c) And that, I believe, is good news, for all of us mixed bags, gathered here in the chapel today....

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



“I believe there is within us this image of God...

There is something deep within us, in everybody,
that gets buried and distorted and confused and corrupted by what happens to us.
But it is there as a source of insight and healing and strength.”

- Frederick Buechner