

## **April 26th: Mosaic God, Mosaic Creation**

Good morning again my friends, and welcome to our new series, Mosaic–this is a series devoted to exploring the intentional diversity of our Bible, Jesus’ ministry, and the world-wide church. We believe that diversity was always God’s plan–so we’ll be taking a closer look at how we can appreciate that diversity, work towards equity for a wide variety of individuals and groups, and make inclusion a core tenet of our faith and practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not bad words in God’s vocabulary–they are in fact essential to the love and transformation that God promises us as part of our personal and the renewing of our world.

Pastor Heather gave us a sneak peek last week when she talked about Jesus’ great banquet being a “mosaic table,” and so we’re carrying that idea forward into this new season. Together we’ll discover how we can embrace this sometimes messy, always holy reality and build stronger communities that truly reflect God’s character and compassion. I hope that by the end of this series, you feel even more eager to welcome new people, hear other perspectives, and honor the experiences of people who might look, act, believe, and live differently than we do.

So before we get started, let’s start with a moment of prayer.

*Mosaic God, we know that you are three persons in one, but we don’t often explore the depth of that divine mystery. It can feel too complicated to us, but we yearn to know you more fully. We long to feel more connected to you and to find meaning in our lives. In this time of reflection, we ask for your presence to be with us–entering into our hearts, filling our minds, and inspiring our souls. Teach us something new this morning that will bring us closer to your intentional plan for diversity in this world, and equip us to carry out your mosaic mission. Amen.*

In one of my all time favorite movies, *The Sound of Music*, Fraulein Maria gathers the attention of the Von Trapp children by singing, “Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.”

I happen to agree with pretty much everything Julie Andrews says and sings, so to launch our new series, we’re starting off by going back to the very beginning of scripture, to the first story we have of creation. We actually have two creation narratives in the book of Genesis, but the one that we’re looking at today is found in the very first chapter of our text, and this is a story that we often tell ourselves to remind ourselves of our spiritual origins and identity. It offers a way for us to imagine more fully who we are and how we got here—so I’m excited to dig into a little bit with you all.

In this first creation narrative, we hear that God takes a pretty methodical approach to forming the world—there are various steps that seem to build on each other, with each step making the world more cohesive and complete. Verse by verse, we get light, the separation of the waters, the land and sea, vegetation, living creatures—all of it adding up to a bigger picture. In verse 26, God reaches the final act of creation before God decides to take a rest: the birth of humanity. Those verses go like this: “Then 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.’ 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Sounds pretty familiar right? Some of us have heard this story so many times that we might miss some of the hidden details, it can be easy to gloss over new insights if we’re not specifically looking for them. For example, did you hear the pronoun that is used in that first sentence? God says, “let us” and “our likeness,” not “let me” or “my likeness.” And that’s not just in the English translation, this is not a recent addition made by contemporary scholars—that’s a distinction that comes directly from the original Hebrew. It’s not a mistake or a modern agenda, that’s been part of God’s identity and story

as soon as it was written down and shared. From the moment of inspiration for the book of Genesis, God is revealed to creation as a plural being.

What exactly does it mean for God to be plural?

Well, the short answer is that it's complicated. The long answer would take years or even decades to explain, so here's my best attempt at the middle answer: Christians believe in what we call "the Trinity" or a "triune God," meaning that we worship a God of three persons. You might have heard the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—or perhaps other titles like Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. When we talk about this powerful, cosmic, creative force that is described in the Book of Genesis, we sometimes differentiate that from the other two persons: Jesus the Savior who came from eternity to earth in order to walk with and save humanity, and the uniting fire that comes at Pentecost to enliven and empower new believers. We use these different names to describe these three identities of God, but we don't actually mean that there are three separate Gods—they are still ultimately still the same God. Each person of the Trinity is distinct, but they form a bigger picture that is rooted in wholeness.

Now, I will be the first to admit that this idea of a plural God is not easy to understand, especially if we're used to seeing Judaism and Christianity as strictly monotheistic religions. It was a big issue in the early church as new believers searched for the right language to describe this spiritual concept, and often failed, resulting in some interesting ideas and even some beliefs we now call heresies. And even today, a lot of theologians and pastors struggle to articulate the fullness of this idea, it's a tricky thing to wrap our brains around! The good thing is that we don't have to fully understand God's pluralness—part of our spiritual journey is accepting that there are things about our universe that we will never fully comprehend. It's part of our humanity to question, wonder, and explore the transcendence of God throughout our whole lives. So no need to walk away from this morning's meditation with all the answers—I definitely won't.

However, I do want us to examine what this plural God can mean for us—the people who believe themselves to be God’s creation, the ones made in God’s image, and formed in God’s likeness.

Going back to these verses from Genesis, we see that out of God’s inherent pluralness comes an intentional desire for diversity—the God who is plural creates humanity who is also plural. From the very beginning, humanity is not created the exact same. Just like the sea creatures and land animals and birds that God brings into being, humanity is created to mirror both God’s variation and wholeness. A God who intentionally uses a plural pronoun to describe themselves creates two different beings out of the dust of the earth. They’re both human, but they are distinct from each other.

Think about it this way: God could have created all of humanity to be the exact same, but God didn’t! God could have created humanity to be uniform and singular, but God didn’t! According to our plural God, there is not just one way to be human—there’s always been multiple. Plurality is at the core of our human story, it’s who we are and who we’ve always been.

Why might this be important for us to remember? Why start our series with this foundational idea?

Well, I think that this story shows us that God’s design for the universe fully embraces plurality. The world that God created for us to enjoy is full of natural differences and creative distinctions. That’s not a bug, that’s a feature! That’s part of God’s design. And so, if our God isn’t afraid of differences and distinctions, because those aspects of who are are part of who we were created to be, then perhaps we can also approach our uniqueness and intentional variations without fear or trepidation. We don’t have to be wary of people who are not exactly like us—we can embrace them as part of God’s sacred, diverse creation. I know this can be easier said than done, especially in a world that seems to enjoy pitting us against each other and profiting off of our anxiety and desire for homogeneity, but I don’t think it has to be as difficult as we might imagine. The poet, activist, professor, and philosopher

Audre Lorde said this, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” When we fully recognize God’s plan for diversity, and we can celebrate that our human identity is rooted in being plural beings, and we can see each other the way that God does—created on purpose, for a purpose.

In addition to this, this creation narrative gives us some insight into how God works and how we might imitate this divine behavior. When the Trinity comes together in those moments of creation, we see that all three parts, all three persons are active and present. In this story we see glimpses of this divine collaboration: God speaks, God hovers, and God creates. From the beginning, we see that God works and moves and imagines together.

As a result, God actually models for us what it looks like to exist in community as a diverse creation. Genesis tells us that within God’s own nature, there isn’t a struggle to determine who is most important or most authoritative—there’s no fighting over who does what or who gets the credit—there’s only vitality and support. Through this story of creation, God exemplifies what it looks like to engage with other beings through a sense of inherent mutuality, God shows us what it looks like to labor together for a holy purpose, and demonstrates how easy it can be to share power in a healthy way. God’s behavior in this first chapter of our Bible shows us that a more harmonious, vibrant, and loving way is possible for all of us.

And so when we think about our world—our families, communities, cultures, nations, and more—we now have an example to follow for how to engage with each other that makes room for both individual dignity and collective action. In fact, we can be inspired by God’s nature to build the same kind of structure and safety in our own spaces—as God’s plural creation, we can create spaces defined by equity, interdependence, and collaboration. When we act in the same way that God does, we too can be mutually supportive, cooperative, and respectful, even if we are different from each other. I believe that this starting point tells us that we can build relationships and communities that empower, uplift, encourage, and strengthen our world.

What does this look like? How can we imagine this new reality?

Well, we're going to start with a brief art history lesson. Specifically, we're going to look at a lesser known medium called mosaics.

Mosaics as an art form date back thousands of years, all the way to the 3rd century BCE in ancient Mesopotamia. These early mosaics were often made out of pebbles, shells, or broken pottery, ordinary objects that were then transformed into these stunning images and scenes.

Mosaics have been used to decorate ancient Roman floors, the altars of early churches, Byzantine buildings, and more. Here are some examples of this type of art—and you can see how intricate this medium can be. On this next slide you can see the process of an artist making a mosaic, and I want us to notice how meticulous and time consuming it is—each piece has to fit into the larger picture in just the right way—and it's not until each piece is in its proper location that the final product comes to life. It can take weeks, years, or even decades to finish a single mosaic.

Despite their complexity, here's what I appreciate about mosaics: In each mosaic, no two pieces are exactly the same. Even the most skilled artisans couldn't make these tiny pieces be perfectly symmetrical or perfectly similar. Even if two pieces are similar in color, they might be different in shape. Even if they are the same shape, they might be varied in color. Even if they are right next to each other, they might be totally different, and that's on purpose. When you get up really close, you see the variation and texture, and that's part of what makes it so intentional and special—it feels thoughtful and handcrafted in a way that some other art forms don't.

That's why I think they are the perfect metaphor for this series!

Our creation narrative tells us that humanity is meant to be a mosaic—we are meant to be different, unique, and individual. In the final verse of our passage for today, God looks at our plural human existence and calls it “very good.” Not

tolerable, not fine, not adequate—very, very good. Our natural variation is a gift that allows us to both be our true selves and be part of a bigger picture. As part of a mosaic, our differences are not a source of imperfection—they reflect the multifaceted reality of our triune, multifaceted God. A mosaic can be an image and an art form that reminds us how glorious it can be when we come together to tell a larger story.

But here's what I most want us to know: God's powerful, creative, loving force isn't done—what started back at the dawn of creation continues to this very day. The church, God's people on earth, is called to be part of a mosaic mission that continues into the present and future, all of us have been invited into this divine process of welcoming and sustaining diversity in our world.

To be fair, the mosaic mission is not an easy process, just like putting all those tiny pieces together is a long and arduous task. For one, There are lots of forces in our world that try to keep us separate or try to enforce sameness in the name of safety—it can be a real challenge to confront those voices and messages. We might encounter opposition from groups or individuals who would prefer that diversity is seen as a threat. And secondly, its success isn't measured in single moments or in easily tracked metrics. It takes time: days, weeks, months, and even years to see progress. It's something we have to live into every day, and in every context. When we do it right, the mosaic mission becomes an essential part of our discipleship and spiritual growth at every stage of our lives. That means everything from our worship, to our relationship building, to our community service has to have God's diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind.

So over the next two months, we'll be diving in deeper into this theme of what it means to be God's mosaic people on a mosaic mission. We'll explore different kinds of diversity related to gender, ethnicity, immigration status, language, age, sexual minority, and learn more about what these distinctions can teach us about being part of this complex and compelling story. We'll look at what it means to not only accept but celebrate these differences as part of God's plan. If you've never considered this topic before, especially as it relates

to your faith, then this is the perfect time to join us each week. Bring your Bibles, bring your questions, and bring your truest, most diverse selves to these conversations.

My friends, I'll close with this: I'm so glad to be on this mosaic journey with you. I'm excited for what we will discover together. I'm ready to see how our congregation and larger community can be transformed when we lean into our mosaic mission. May our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer fill us with the energy and curiosity to engage with this theme with open hearts and open hands.

Amen.