

Christ the Image of God

By Linda Rex

July 17, 2022, PROPER 11—Have you ever played Redactle? If you love words and reading, you can very easily get sucked into a vortex of a passionate desire to guess the title and content of the current Wikipedia article. The content of today's article resonated with me as I read it (spoiler alert!) and thought about the affect one person or family could have upon the nation and world in which they lived.

Yesterday, my son told me about another mass shooting that had occurred—a heart-rending devastation for innocent people just going about their everyday lives. These aches joined with angst over the increasing inflation and some recent experiences of rampant disrespect expressed by the loss of simple courtesies, made my heart ache even more than ever.

The Old Testament reading for this Sunday, Amos 8:1–12, as well as the psalms, Psalm 52 and 15, express a cry from God's heart against all that is destructive and evil in this world. The evil one seeks control, disunity, and destruction, while Christ seeks to express his love, restoration, and unity by his Spirit through human hearts. Too often we respond to the inner cry to do as we please, to seek self-gratification and self-glory rather than to humble ourselves to be who we really are, the ones created to reflect the love and other-centered way of being of the God who made us.

How easy it is for us to get sucked down into the vortex of self. Its cry is siren and its influence is strong. It is seductive—we are often halfway into our surrender to the pleasure before we realize that we may never get out again. What we defend as our freedom to choose is so often a lie. What we lose sight of is that God has given us freedom—but in Christ he has freed us to truly be ourselves—children of God who love him and one another, who are free to know and be known by God down to our deepest level. This is true freedom.

We shine with the majesty of God's nature when we are being true to who we are as God's children. When we live in other-centered ways, making room for one another, we shine out as lights in a world darkened by satanic self-absorption and self-will. The darkness does not appreciate the entry of true light into its sphere. We cannot shine with our own light, though—it is too easily dimmed or refracted. We must draw the light with which we shine from the true Light, Jesus Christ, in order to be true reflections of God's glory in this dark world.

This is an incredible mystery—how we shine with the light of God's very being as we open ourselves to the Spirit of Christ, allowing him to live in and through us that life which he forged in our humanity when he walked the earth. What we used to believe about God is held up to the mirror of Jesus who is the exact image of the Father, being God in human flesh. We discover, when looking into the mirror who is Jesus Christ that we are not alienated from God or hostile to him, but we are held with Christ in God by the Spirit, participants in his very life and love.

It was the Father's good pleasure that the fulness of the divine One dwell in Christ, in his human flesh, living our life, dying our death, and rising up into new life. God was pleased to have his Son dwell among us, taking our human flesh upon himself to be redeemed, restored, and renewed, enabling us to be fully reconciled with God in every way. And indeed, in Christ, we discover that God has reconciled all things, in heaven and on earth—an incredible thought that I struggle to get my mind around. How far is the extent of the reconciliation or peace God achieved for us in Christ if it includes both heaven and earth? Apparently, it has no end.

The mystery arises again—how can we shine brightly when our flesh so often seems to fill this world with darkness? We live in that complex place where the kingdom of God reigns and yet the kingdom of darkness attempts to maintain control of what God has declared is his. We are in

the midst of the already-but-not-yet of God's kingdom, where we only experience bittersweet glimpses of the world to come. We are ambassadors of Christ—finding ourselves as foreigners in a world that doesn't understand or accept us at times. Our customs and ways of living may seem odd to those around us, because we have adopted a design for living—our true way of being—which is often counter-cultural.

We need to stay focused on Jesus Christ, the true Light. We draw our real existence or life from him. We are held with Christ in God (Col. 3:3), and what matters most is that in Christ, we live face to face with the Father in the Spirit. It is Christ in us by the Spirit who holds us safely in the presence of the Father, in his eternal embrace of love. No person, no force, no created thing—nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). This is God's word to us as his children.

Just as the Father is the fulness of Christ in their divine oneness in the Spirit, we find our fulness in Jesus' humanity held in the presence of the Father in the Spirit. All things in heaven and earth were created by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. He has always existed, and holds all things together. He is the beginning and the end—the Lord of all. He has done, is doing, and will do, all that is needed to finish what he has begun in us. That is our comfort and peace—thank you, Jesus!

Heavenly Father, thank you for delighting in us and for making us your very own. Thank you, Jesus, for holding us ever in the eternal embrace of the Trinity, enabling us to participate in your life and love. Thank you, Spirit, for making all that is ours in Christ individually our own, enabling us to see the face of the Father in the face of his Son. Amen.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Colossians 1:15–28 NASB

"Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.; But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'" " Luke 10:38–42 NASB