

Welcome to today's Sunday service for June 20th 2021!

Let's begin with praying together. Take a few minutes to find peace here. Be comfortable as you sit. Allow your shoulders to drop, leave your worries at the door. Let go of the piles of washing that need doing before school and work tomorrow. Leave those bills alone, you can come back to them later. Be at peace here, this calm and safe place where you are with God, and with friends, to worship God together.

Still those racing thoughts.

Breathe gently, let your earthly distractions disappear and breathe in and out the awesome breath of God. Let Him wash over you today, you are welcome here.

Our gracious loving Father, you find us here again, ready and waiting to hear your word. We are ready and waiting to hear you. We bring all our worries, our anxieties and fears, all our hopes and dreams, big and small, knowing your love for each of us is beyond our human understanding.

God of our ups and downs,
we come together in your name
with worries in our hearts and questions on our minds,
with troubles in our lives and fears for our world.

We come trusting that you
share our concerns and hear our questions,
embrace our troubles and know our fears.

We come trusting that you never give up on us,
that you never abandon us, never dismiss us.

For you are a God of love, of peace, of power –
you are our God. Amen.

Song To Be In Your Presence

To be in your presence
To sit at your feet
Where your love surrounds me
And makes me complete

This is my desire, O Lord
This is my desire

This is my desire, O Lord
This is my desire

To rest in your presence
Not rushing away
To cherish each moment
Here I would stay

This is my desire, O Lord
This is my desire
This is my desire, O Lord
This is my desire.

Noel Richards © 1991 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Integrity Music) CCLI:8026

Song Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed

Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home

John Newton Public Domain CCLI:8026

The Gospel of Luke 15:11-24 The Passion Translation

The Loving Father

Then Jesus said, "Once there was a father with two sons. The younger son came to his father and said, 'Father, don't you think it's time to give me my share of your estate?' So the father went ahead and distributed between the two sons their inheritance. Shortly afterward, the younger son packed up all his belongings and travelled off to see the world. He journeyed to a far-off land where

he soon wasted all he was given in a binge of extravagant and reckless living.

“With everything spent and nothing left, he grew hungry, because there was a severe famine in that land. So he begged a farmer in that country to hire him. The farmer hired him and sent him out to feed the pigs. The son was so famished, he was willing even to eat the slop given to the pigs, because no one would feed him a thing.

“Humiliated, the son finally realized what he was doing, and he thought, ‘There are many workers at my father’s house who have all the food they want with plenty to spare. They lack nothing. Why am I here dying of hunger, feeding these pigs and eating their slop? I want to go back home to my father’s house, and I’ll say to him, “Father, I was wrong. I have sinned against you. I’ll never again be worthy to be called your son. Please, Father, just treat me like one of your employees.” ’

“So the young son set off for home. From a long distance away, his father saw him coming, *dressed as a beggar*, and great compassion swelled up in his heart for his son who was returning home. The father raced out to meet him, swept him up in his arms, hugged him dearly, and kissed him over and over with tender love.

“Then the son said, ‘Father, I was wrong. I have sinned against you. I could never deserve to be called your son. Just let me be - ’

“The father interrupted and said, ‘Son, you’re home now!’

“Turning to his servants, the father said, ‘Quick, bring me the best robe, my very own robe, and I will place it on his shoulders. Bring the ring, the seal of sonship, and I will put it on his finger. And bring out the best shoes you can find for my son. Let’s *prepare a great feast* and celebrate. For my beloved son was once dead, but now he’s alive! Once he was lost, but now he is found!’ And everyone celebrated with overflowing joy.

Prayers of apology and forgiveness

God of our questions and our struggles,
when we too quickly mistake silence for indifference:

forgive and help us.

When the voice of our own needs silences the voices of others:

forgive and help us.

When we abandon others in their storm and watch safely from the shore:

forgive and help us.

When we lose faith because things get tough:

forgive and help us.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus,

you do not let us sink when our faith is going under.

You do not let our boats overturn when the seas of our life get rough.

You do not let our questions swamp us or our failures destroy us.

Rather, you forgive us, you save us,

you encourage, challenge and calm us –

and for this we are thankful. **Amen.**

Song **We Seek Your Kingdom Here**

We seek your kingdom throughout every sphere

We long for heaven's demonstration here

Jesus your light shine bright for all to see

Transform, revive, and heal society

Before all things, in him were all things made

Inspiring culture, media, and trade

May all our work serve your economy

Transform, revive, and heal society

Peace, truth, and justice reigning everywhere

With us be present in our public square

Fill all who lead with your integrity

Transform, revive, and heal society

Forgive us Lord, when we have not engaged

Failing to scribe your heart on history's page

Make us again what we were made to be

Transform, revive, and heal society

Faithful to govern ever may we be

Selfless in service, loving constantly

In everything may your authority

Transform, revive, and heal society

Song The Father's Song by Matt Redman

I have heard so many songs
Listened to a thousand tongues
But there is one
That sounds above them all

The Father's song
The Father's love
You sung it over me and for eternity
It's written on my heart

Heaven's perfect melody
The Creator's symphony
You are singing over me
The Father's song

Heaven's perfect mystery
The king of love has sent for me
And now you're singing over me
The Father's song

I have heard so many songs
Listened to a thousand tongues
But there is one
That sounds above them all

The Father's song
The Father's love
You sung it over me and for eternity
It's written on my heart

It's Heaven's perfect mystery
The king of love has sent for me
And now you're singing over me
The Father's song

Sermon

Made in the image of God

Today my sermon will be considering what it means to us to have a God who is our Father. Many here will be familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son which we heard earlier and you might be thinking I have made an almighty gaff by calling this talk The Prodigal Father. Not today anyway! The word prodigal has 2 contradictory meanings. The one we know which means to be wasteful of money or resources and also conversely, to be extravagant and generous.

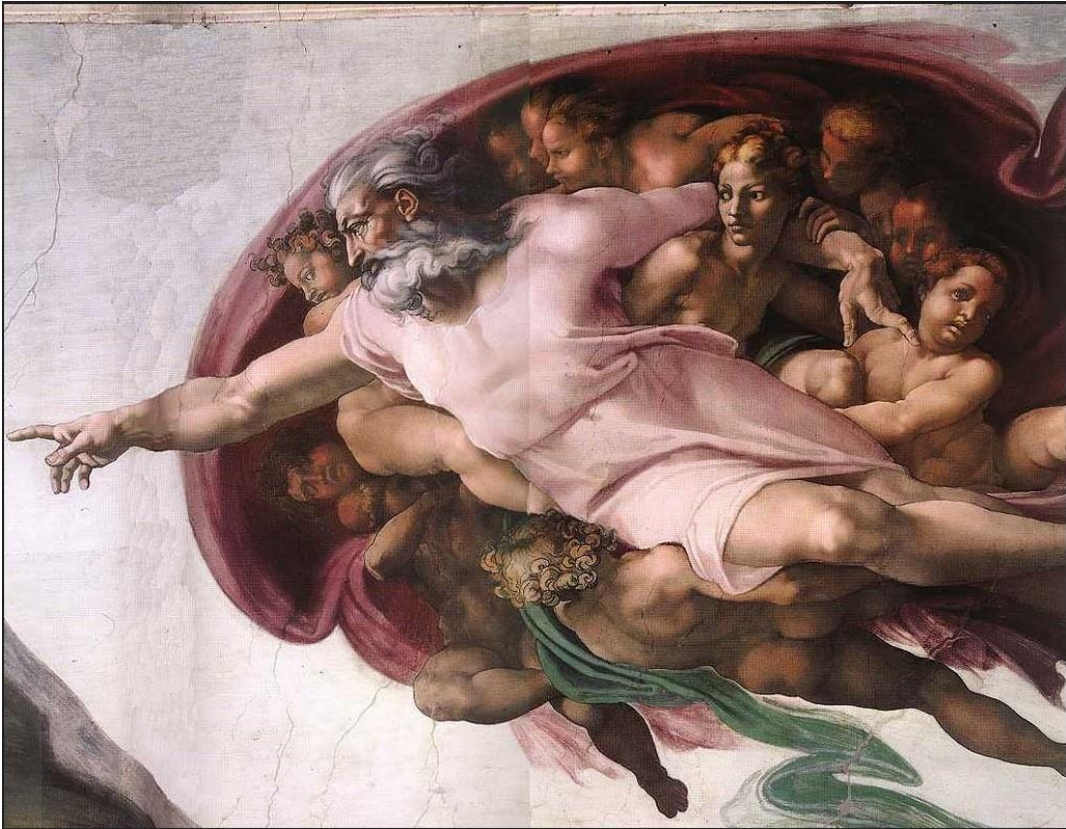
When we hear this story, we often focus on the young man, the prodigal son,; how he behaved (badly), but eventually realised what a mess he had made of his life, returned home, and asked his father to take him back as a servant! He didn't feel worthy to be called a son any more. But the part of the story that would have shocked those hearing it for the first time is the next bit. A son who had shamed his family by behaving so badly would not have been welcomed back under any circumstances. Yet the young man's father welcomed him back with open and loving arms and without hesitation or reservation. Perhaps a better title for the story is- The Prodigal father's unconditional love.

Over the many centuries artists have painted and drawn how they visualise God to be. Like these early cave paintings found in Cappadocia which is now in modern day Turkey;





During the renaissance period art became more fluid and developed;





Contemporary art does try to capture the ethereal nature of God, referencing the invisible quality of the Holy Spirit;

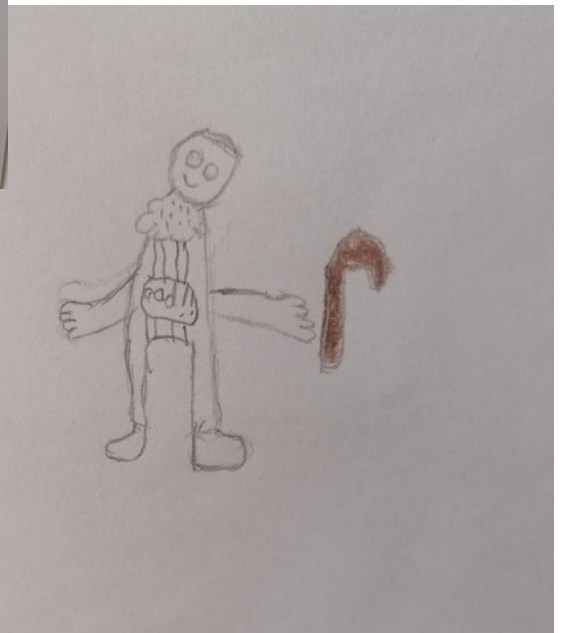
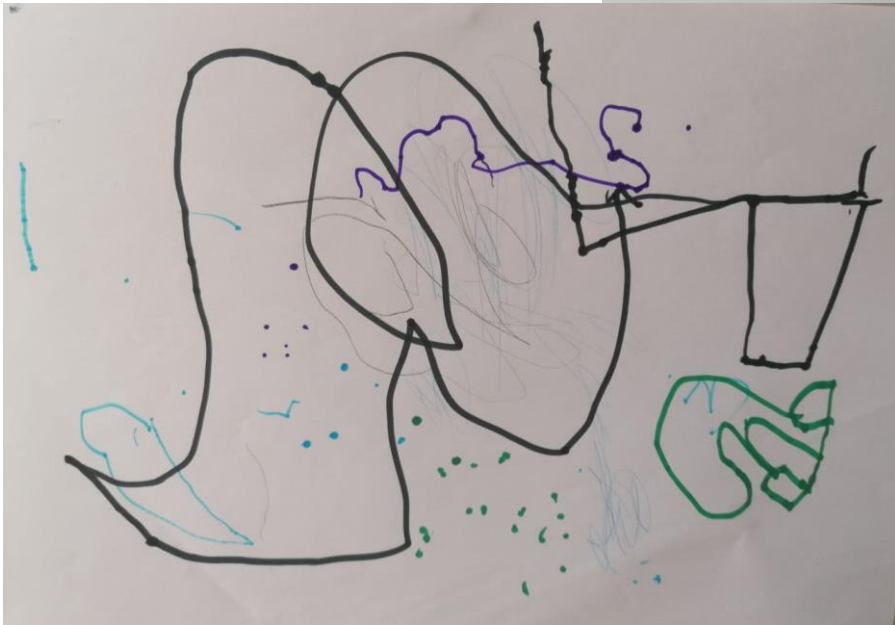
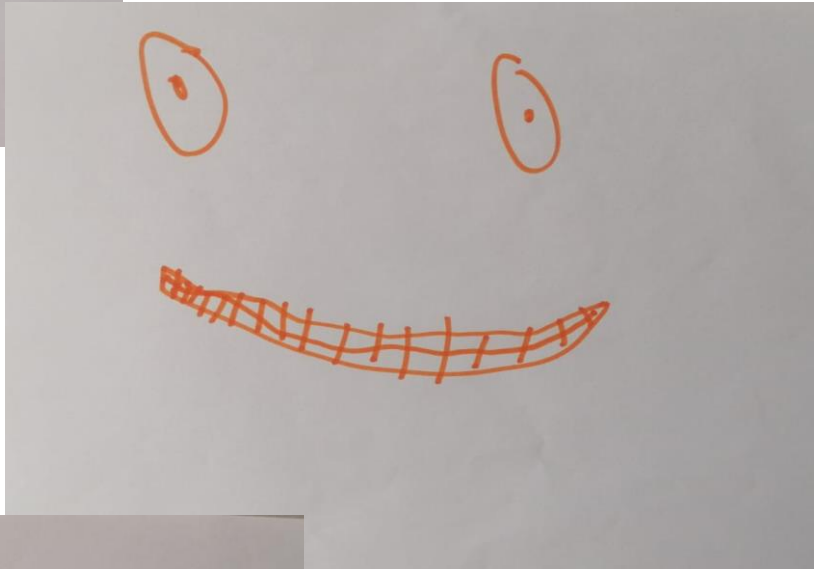


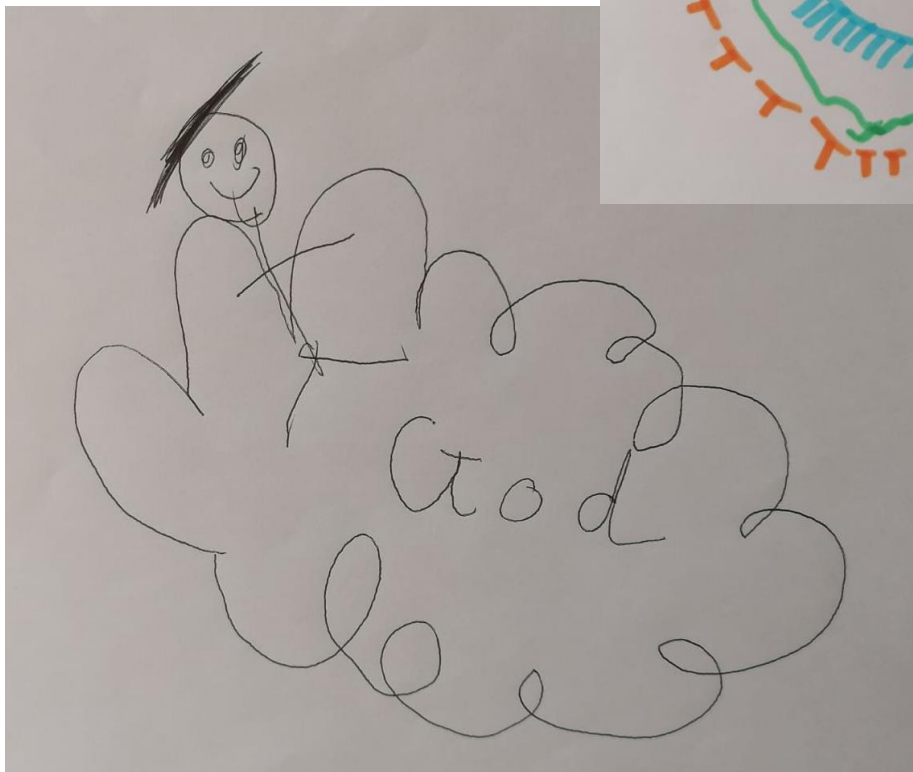
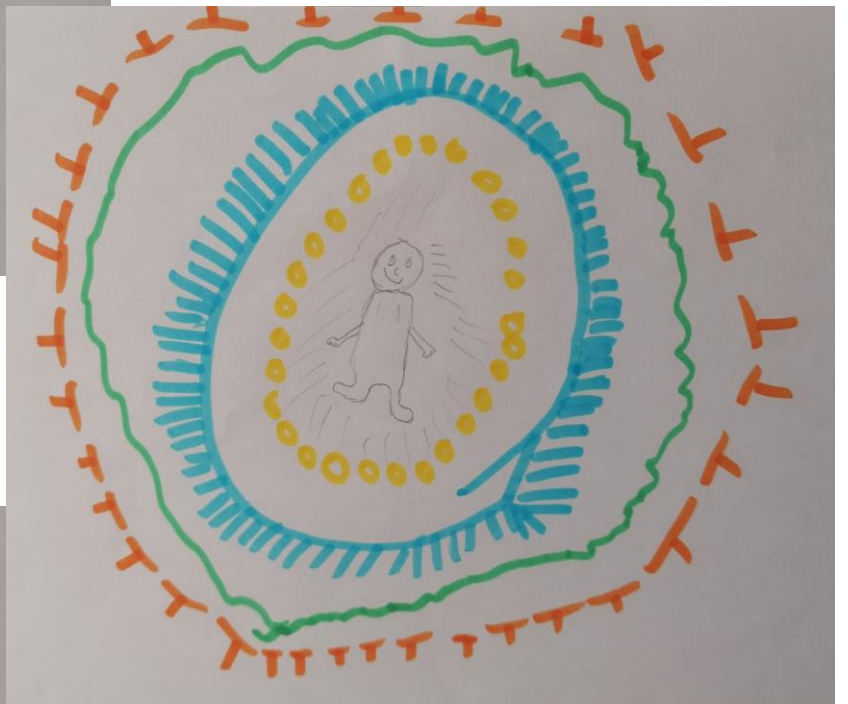
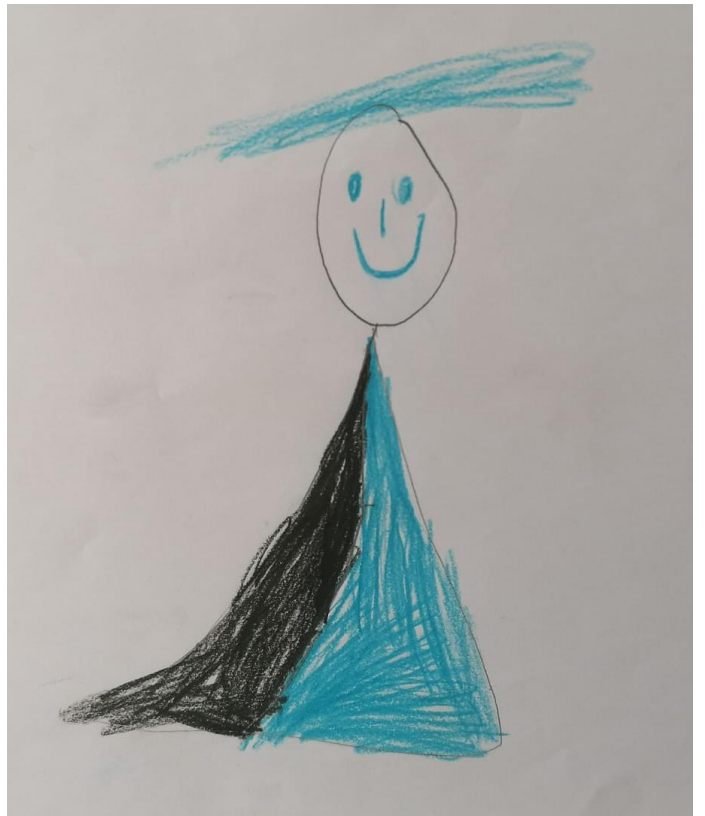


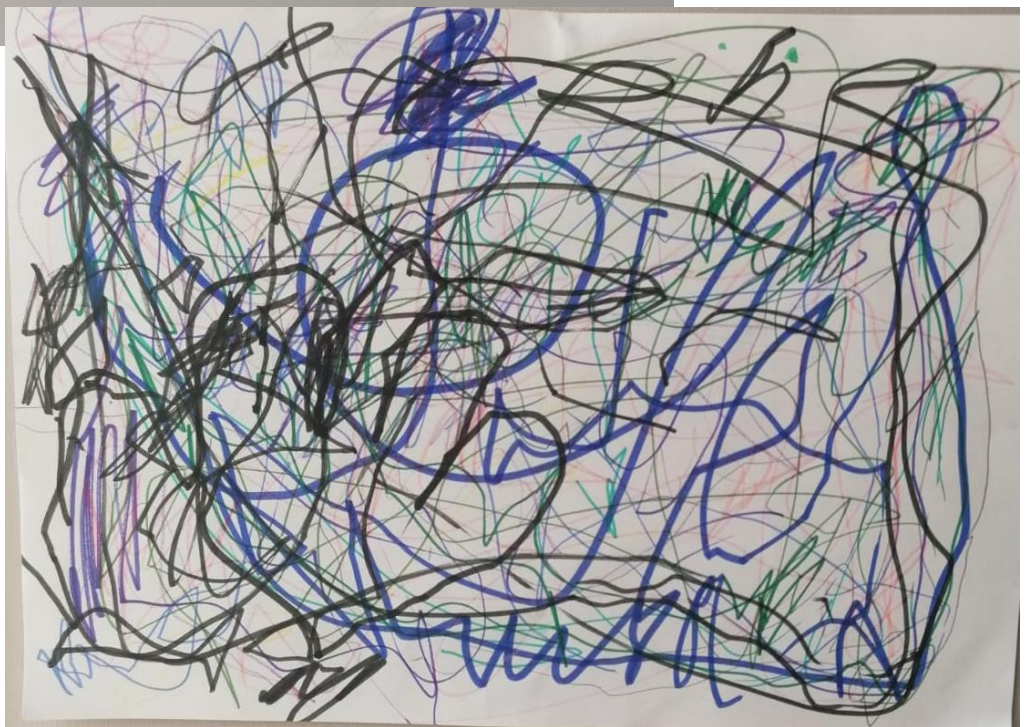
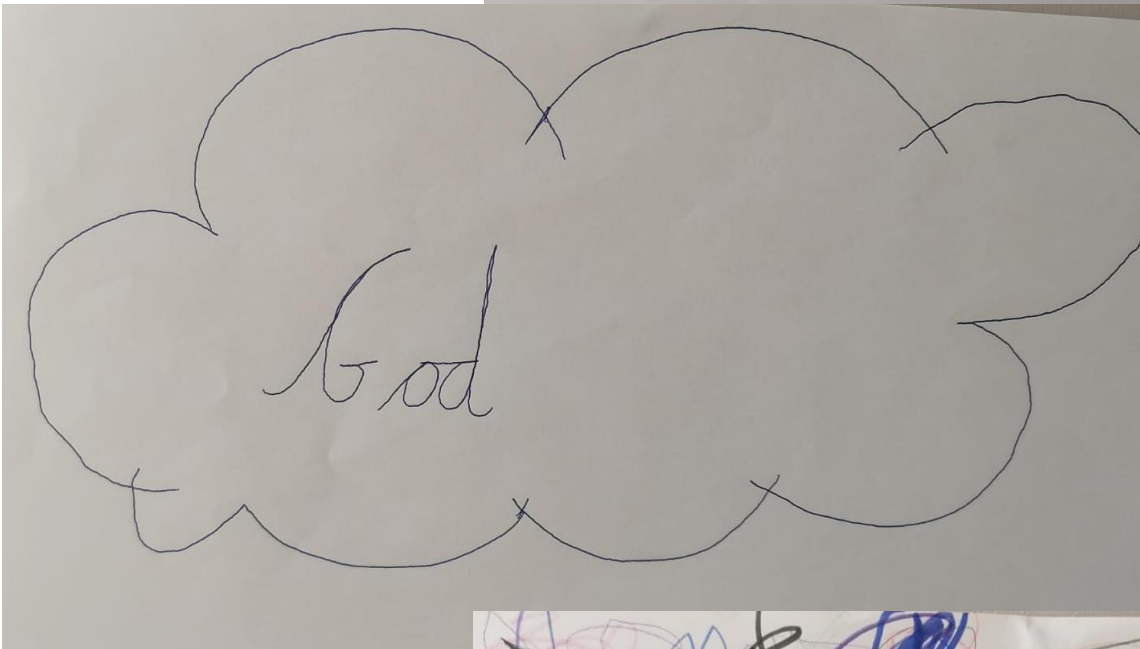
All very beautiful but even the best artists still can't really encapsulate the true whole likeness of God. How could they when we have never seen Him?

Last Sunday our church children were asked to draw what they thought God looked like and a few made videos of themselves. Shall we have a look at them?









See how difficult it is! We still tend to think of God as a stern old man, usually Caucasian, sitting on a cloud! And most definitely with a beard!

We have a human need to “visualise “God, yet despite the complex and extraordinary brain we have been given we find it hard to imagine someone who doesn’t have a human body and we cannot see!

I have one more image for you, a few years ago a study was done at a theological college in the States and 200 + students were asked to draw what they thought God was like and through the magic of science a composite picture was drawn;



Same old thing! Caucasian!

Some of you will have had a go at the quiz sheet you were given today. Hopefully with some success but the lesson here is that sons don't always look like their fathers!

Yet we know in the bible we are told that we are made in the image of God. So if it's not necessarily by his physical appearance, what does it mean?

How do we know what God's image is?

How do we find that out?

Fortunately we have been given the best letter ever written; the bible and it is in here we can learn to visualise what it means to be made in the image of God. In here we can read about how God reaches out to us, telling us all about himself, and how he made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross so that we can have a personal relationship with him.

If you asked someone out in the street to describe God you will probably get a similar description to our children's efforts. They might describe God as some sort of distant being who is out of reach, out of touch and quite probably not remotely interested in our lives. Quite possibly sitting on a cloud. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our God is the ultimate father and he wants to have a profound father-like relationship with us, we are his children.

Not everyone gets super- excited about Father's Day although I could of course say the same about Mother's day. Not everyone's experience has been completely rosy. We may have had a chilly relationship with our own Dads varying from indifference, to neglect, or abuse. Some of us may not know who our fathers were. Some have cut contact.

That might have been your experience. If that is the case then it may not be easy to hear that we have a father-God. We may feel disturbed at the thought, our personal experience will have skewed what good fathering is like.

Just know this! We have a holy father who sacrificed everything to have an intimate relationship with us, to be a father who loves us unconditionally, who we can talk to, can trust and we can turn to!

I have a confession! I'm one of those people who always reads the last few pages of a book before I buy it. I may read the first paragraph too but no more. I read newspapers from the back to the front too! But I know it doesn't always makes sense so today let's start at the beginning!

“We are made In the image of God

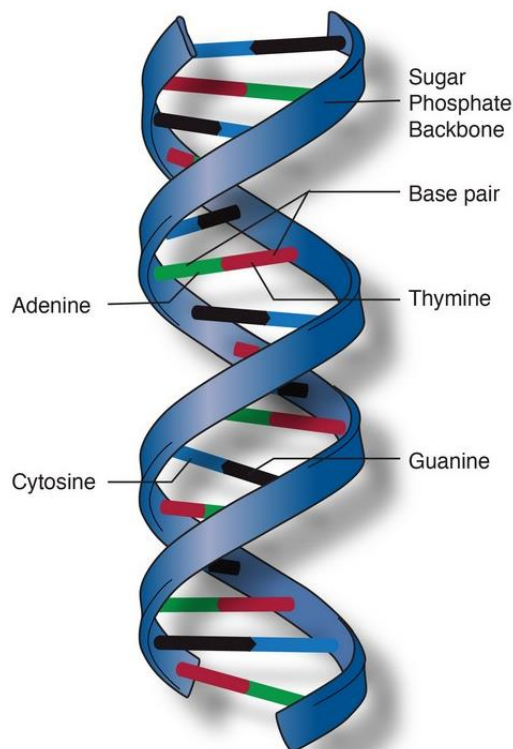
So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27”

Given our human need to have a mental image of what God looks like and knowing that we just can't visualise God then we need to look for other ways which tell us what the true image of God is

One way is by looking at his different qualities.

Given that these early verses are a metaphor, it's worth taking note that God made mankind in the plural. Both male and female are made in the image of God; the whole of humanity is made in his image. God is the Father of all mankind, from N to S, from East to West, every human being on earth is made in the image of God.

Thank goodness it is entirely possible to believe in the science of evolution and still be a thinking- Christian. One does not exclude the other so for a moment let's consider our DNA.



Deoxyribonucleic acid is a molecule composed of two polynucleotide chains that coil around each other to form a double helix carrying genetic instructions for the development, functioning, growth and reproduction of all known organisms.

Richard Rohr is an American author, spiritual writer, and Franciscan friar based in Albuquerque, New Mexico who writes wonderfully and this what he says about DNA.

“You begin with your unique divine DNA, an inner destiny as it were, an absolute core that knows the truth about you’ and continues ‘It is precisely the divine part of you that is great enough, deep enough, gracious enough to fully accept the human part of you.”

I like this! I think it helpful to think of our DNA as being divine and our inner destiny gifted to us by God. We are made in the image of God, even into our DNA. Like words run through a stick of rock!

God sent his son Jesus Christ to help us re-connect with Him, our Father and it is through Jesus we can make some sense of what God is like. Jesus was the perfect image of God and by getting to know him we can see all the qualities of God. Jesus gave us every lesson we will ever need. Jesus taught us exactly what it feels like to know how much we are loved and held tight by the greatest Father in heaven. It is by understanding this we become better people, better fathers and mothers, better friends and better citizens. It is by imitating Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit that we start to become the image of God.

When we start to realise that not only are we are made in the father’s image but that everyone around us is too, then we can really treat them with the honour, love and respect they are due. If we see everyone as being in the image of God then everything changes.

Jesus is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being “ Hebrews 1:3

“God made us aware of our own self and that of others.”

Let's move on to another quality of God which will help us to visualise what God, our own heavenly Father is like. God made us sentient beings with the power to think and to reason. Able to think abstractly. Just like He does. We have the capacity to be self-aware and conscious of “I” and “you”. We are made in the image of God! It is because of these gifts we have been given that we can feel emotions. The bible often refers to God as experiencing sadness, hurt, anger and joy, exactly the same as us. God knows exactly how we suffer. By sending his son Jesus Christ he reached out to us, reminding us we are not alone. He understands everything about us and he will never leave us.

“God designed us to appreciate beauty!”

Our Father God gave us an appreciation of what is beautiful too. We need beauty to make us thrive! Some of us appreciate art, some of us music and literature and the natural world. Our environment can make us grow or retreat. We need beauty! There is something ethereal or heavenly about some worship songs that can make our own hearts sing! Have you ever had that experience of goose-bumps when you hear someone sing? God our Father gave us all this as a gift to enjoy. The keen readers among us will have our favourite genres from fantasy, high drama to classical literature which energise our imaginations. God gave us the arts in all its many forms to entertain and invigorate ourselves because God is an artist and we are in his image. Our heavenly Father did all this to make us thrive, to sparkle, to enjoy life! God designed beauty in the creation of life.

“God hard-wired us to understand right from wrong”

God, the heavenly artist, designed us to understand morals too. All cultures throughout the earth have their own sense of right and wrong, whatever their faith or none. God the father is moral and ethical. Because we are made in His image we too have a moral code. A bit like having an internal compass set to North. We know what is right or wrong. We are made in his image! Yes sometimes humans lose their way, their internal compass goes awry but the internal sense of right and wrong is deeply-ingrained in us all. Our

heavenly father knows us better than we will ever know ourselves and if we put out our hands, he will always bring us back onto the straight road.

“God gifted us with the ability to appreciate and value relationships with others”

God, our heavenly Father teaches us everything we need to know to make our human relationships thrive. His greatest desire is to have an intimate relationship with us first. We can then know what a healthy relationship really looks like and pass this wisdom down the line. Relationships are hugely important to us! Meaningful friendships and family relationships are central to our sense of well-being. Conversely loneliness and broken relationships do us great harm. We are always affected if our relationships go wrong.

We are indeed made in God’s image. When our relationship with God hits a rough patch, and it does sometimes, we need to understand that God wants nothing more than to be in our corner. The very least we can do is re-build our innate connection with Him. When we hurt, so does He. When we are sad, so is he. When we joyful, so is He. God is our greatest coach for living and he will never leave us.

People are made in God’s image, we are comprised of mind, emotions and will. We are sentient and self-aware. We are moral beings with our ‘moral grammar’ giving us an innate orientation of ‘right’ and ‘fair’, and what is not. We have an instinctive capacity to develop and appreciate beauty, drama, art and story in all its forms. And we will innately and naturally seek out and develop relationships and friendships with others. We are all this because God is all this and we are made in God’s image.

Remember the prodigal father and son?

So to finish, let us look back at the parable of the prodigal son and indeed the prodigal father. The son who abused his father, messed up his life big time, squandered all the inheritance he was freely given, who realised how badly he had messed up, who returned to his father as broken as it is possible to be, expecting to be shunned and disowned.

Look at the prodigal father. The father so forgiving and extravagantly loving, in spite of everything his son had done. Who ran to him and wrapped him in a bear hug. Who brought him home in a fanfare of joy, to a party in his honour!

Now THIS is the image of God, this is the image of our perfect loving father I want you to remember today. By copying the lessons we are taught by Jesus we too become crafted into God's image. An image made of pure love. Because that is what it comes down to, it always does. Amen

Prayer

God of power and peace,
when the storm is raging:

You are there.

When our boats are sinking:

You are there.

When faith slips through our fingers:

You are there.

When our hearts sink and our courage fails:

You are there.

In the roar of the waves,
in the sound of the wind,
and in the silence:

You are there.

So, we praise you.

We thank you.

We worship you.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Video **The UK Makaton Blessing**

The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His
Face toward you
And give you peace

Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen

The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His
Face toward you
And give you peace

As we receive, we agree, amen
Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen (amen, amen)
Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen

May His favour be upon you
And a thousand generations
Your family and your children
And their children, and their children

May His favour be upon you
And a thousand generations
And your family and your children
And their children, and their children

May His presence go before you
And behind you, and beside you
All around you, and within you
He is with you, He is with you
In the morning, in the evening
He is with you, He is with you

Public Domain

Accepting the offering prayer

God of great wonders
You gave us a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.
You give us life and breath
you fill the world with beauty,

our hands with bounty,
and our hearts with the desire to give.
Accept these gifts,
and ourselves in service always,
Amen.

Blessing

I bless you today
I bless you for tomorrow
I bless all your family and friends as we walk into this next week.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Go in peace and serve the Lord. Amen