

**Created in God's Own Image:  
Transgender Children and the Church  
Genesis 1:26-31**

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in Their own image, in the image of God They created them; male and female They created them. God blessed them... And it was so. God saw everything that they had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

Back in July, I celebrated the thirty-fourth anniversary of my ordination as a Presbyterian minister. What you don't know, and I had pushed to the back of my memory, is that I almost wasn't ordained a minister. This had nothing to do with my grades in seminary nor my passing the 5 ordination exams Presbyterian clergy are required to pass, nor with the statement of faith, we must write and defend on the floor of the ordaining presbytery. It was for none of those reasons. The reason was simply a "pronoun". In response to a question, I used the pronoun "he" for God.

I know, it seems silly doesn't it using the traditional English gender pronoun "he" for God.

That moment on the floor of Blackhawk Presbytery became for me a theological "teachable" moment in my faith journey that I still am learning from today.

As we gather together in this time of learning about Transgender Children and the Church, it is worth our exploring the pronouns we use for God and each other.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a pronoun is: "any of a small set of words in a language that are used as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases and whose referents are named or understood in the context."

Some of the personal pronouns people use instead of a noun or noun phrase are: "he, she, his, hers, they, theirs, ours, you, me, them, we and us."

Traditionally, the Church has used masculine pronouns when speaking of God. Yet, as much as we, and we being the larger, historical "Church" have referred to God as being "male". God is not a man nor is masculine in nature.

Some have countered then that when speaking about God people should be more inclusive in their language, using pronouns like "She, Her, and Hers," to reflect more fully the feminine nature of God too.

Yet, God's "gender identity" is no more female than male. God has no specific gender. In today's language, we can speak of God as non-binary in nature. For those of you that are not familiar with the word "Non-Binary" it is a term used "to describe gender identities that don't fall exclusively into one of two categories: male or female."

Biblically speaking, God is "Gender Expansive" which is "an umbrella term that expands notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for one's society or context."

Now, this may all be new to you, yet it really isn't all that new. God has always been "non-binary" and "gender expansive" in nature from the very beginning.

Let's take a closer look at Genesis 1. As we read this morning and have read many times before, in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, God also created humankind. This we know, right?

Yet, read it again. "Then God said, 'Let Us make humankind in our image, according to Our likeness... So God created humankind in Their own image, in the image of God They created them; male and female They created them. God blessed them... And it was so. God saw everything that they had made, and indeed, it was very good.'"

God nature is not any one specific gender nor any gender at all. God is. If we are to use pronouns to more fully describe the Creator in whose image all humankind, "we", are all created, then we would need to use "Us, They, Them, Their, Our, Us, or We".

In that way, theologically speaking, when referring to ourselves as Children of God, who are created in God's own image or likeness, to use gender-specific pronouns actually is very limiting in our own identity. God is and so are we. God is neither this gender or that one. God's very nature is both feminine and masculine at the time same time and so much more.

And here is an important thing for us to remember, so is our very human nature. We use gender-specific pronouns because that is what our English language has taught us to use. Yet, this limits us in speaking of the fullness of the very One in whose likeness we are created.

You as a congregation at some point prior to my becoming your pastor actually discussed this. Look at your bulletin. Each Sunday this statement is in a prominent place, but I am guessing overlooked by you. It says: Oakland-Cambridge Presbyterian Church is committed to using language in such a way that all members of the community of faith may recognize themselves to be included, addressed, and equally cherished before God. Seeking to bear witness to the whole world, the church struggles to use language which is faithful to the biblical truth and which neither purposefully nor inadvertently excludes people because of gender, color, or other circumstance in life. (Book of Order, W-1.2006)

Every human being has in them a mixture of psychological, physiological, spiritual feminine and masculine characteristics that are more than gender, they are reflective of the fullness of God's sacred image!

Cultural and Social Norms have taught people which masculine and feminine characteristics they should develop and own as children. Boys don't cry because they are tough and don't show emotion. Girls don't get dirty, play with dolls and wear dresses. We now no these to be wrong, even harmful to our human psychological development. Men are nurtures, care givers, cook, raise

their children and show emotion and cry. Women get dirty playing sports, hold powerful jobs equal to men, and our powerful political leaders of nations, and one day soon perhaps of the United States!

We also assume our gender is determined at birth. A person is either born male or female. But as we will learn more of this morning, that isn't necessarily true.

About one in 1,500-2,000 babies are born with a physical anomaly which is referred to as "intersex". Intersex is "a term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male." My understanding is that when this happens, a medical specialist is called to help make surgical changes giving the baby one or the other defining genitalia.

It is also known that some babies' chromosomes may also not be fully determined at birth. So a baby born with male or female genitalia, may actually be psychologically wired to be the opposite gender.

Our guest this morning, Dr. Jenny Winters, is going to share with us more about this.

So here is where I am going to leave us.

Whatever your physical gender or gender identity, whatever pronouns you use to identify yourself to others, please remember this. We are all created in God's own likeness which is so much more than any gender can define. God isn't a man nor is God a woman. God's pronouns are not "He" or "His" or "Him" or "She" and "Her" or "Hers". God is "They" and "Them". God is "You" and "Me". God is "We" and "Us".

I am glad I used the pronoun "He" for God. Had I not done so, I may never have opened myself up to a greater and deeper understanding of the true nature of the One in whom "We" all live and move and have our being.

Amen.