

PR3450: Preaching, Passion and the Spirit, Fall 2008

Preacher: Sung Hwan Kim

Text: Exodus 20:4

Title: "Don't make Idol for yourself, for I will send you one!"

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth."

Prayer

Holy Spirit, we invite you to come.

Holy Spirit, Here I stand as a preacher, whose comfortable English is different than the language of the audience. So, I need you to do what you did 2,000 years ago at the Pentecost.

Holy Spirit, without you my words are dead. Come and breathe to my words so the text can come alive and open our eyes to a new reality that this text reveal to us. Amen

My seven years old daughter asked me one day "Daddy, why can't we see God?" I did not know the answer. "Daughter, I don't know the answer. Actually, that is my question, too. Someday, when we go to heaven we will ask God why he was invisible."

I wish we can see God with our eyes.

Don't you have the desire to see God?

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow said there are five levels of hierarchy of human needs. At the bottom of the pyramid are the physiological needs. And according to him, on the very top of the pyramid is our need for self-actualization. But I think Maslow should go up one more step. And that is our need to see God.

Isn't that the very reason that we are here studying in the Princeton Theological seminary?
By being here, we want to see God in a way that we haven't known before. We want to see God.

That is perhaps why Moses when he got chance in the wilderness, boldly expresses his greatest desire. "God, show me your glory." That is to say, "God, Show me your face!"

"I will pass by, then you shall see my back but my face shall not be seen."

Perhaps when we see in Metropolitan Museum, other primitive religion's making all this superstitious images in the elephants, cows, dragons, and bulls and worship them. Our response should be not the judgment and condemnation but compassion of fellow human being because their images are result of their desire to see the face of God even though they are distorted desire.

Regardless of color of our skin, age, nationality, sex and regardless of whatever, we human creatures created in the image of God and according to the likeness of God are creature of imagination and visuality and more than anything we want to visualize the image of God and see God. God made us to be so. Trillion cells of our body cry, "We want to see God."

But today's text specifically prohibits us from making the image of God.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol.”

Word Study: Pashal & Eikon

We feel negative connotation when we hear the word, idol. But the Hebrew word used for idol in the text is PASHAL meaning “carved images.” and interestingly the Greek word used in the Septuagint for the word is EIKON from which we get the English word, ICON. Image simply refers to figures or statues carved out of wood, clay, and Stone.

Icon means window that opens to different reality. It is a contact point to a whole different world. Just like clicking an icon on computer desktop we enter into a whole different window.

“Do not carve for yourself my image, my icon for yourself, thinking that by clicking the icon will open up a whole new window of reality of God.”

Misinterpretation of the text

This is a difficult passage. This passage has been one of the passages widely misunderstood in the course of church history.

Misinterpretation of this very text was the direct cause of the split between Western Roman church and Eastern Byzantine Church. Western Church thought 3 dimensional images are OK, and Eastern Church thought only 2 dimensional images are OK. But is that what this text is about?

In Some Asian countries, extreme fundamental Christians go around Buddhist temple all over the nation and destroy the statue of Buddha. Some several hundred years old, some thousand years old national treasures out of obedience to this second commandment. But is that what this text is about?

There is deeper meaning to this text than that.

Why then the prohibition? Two reasons.

1. First, because Human made images of God limits God

No created thing can represent the creator. Any images of God boxes God in.

God is God of universe. God is beyond the universe. God created the universe. God is different than anything in the universe. That is why we call God Holy God. He is a different being.

Even our mental image of God boxes God in.

We can have this image of God as Triumphant God but at the same time God is suffering God.

We can have this image of God as loving God but at the same time God is God of justice.

We can perceive God through a theological Seminary’s academic lens, but go to mission field in the 3rd country and the God is very different God out there.

Sometimes we become so comfortable with certain images of God and we don’t want to break out of them.

By being caught up in an image of God, we are creating God in our image. But God cannot be imprisoned by any human made images, physical or mental.

2. Second reason God prohibits making an image is because images become eventually substitute for God

I used to enjoy watching Jesus movies. They can be good educational and missionary tools.

One of my favorites was Jesus of Nazareth directed by the famous Franco Zeffirelli.

But, one day, I noticed myself when I close my eyes to pray to Jesus, I found myself praying to Robert

Powell, the Anglo actor with blue eyes who played the role of Jesus.

Images can substitute God.

When we materialize and localize an image of God, the place, the thing, the person can easily substitute for God.

“Do not carve for yourself an image.”

Brothers and Sisters

How are we, the creature of imagination, then relate to this invisible God without any contact point?

Without any visual aid?

That is our dilemma and lament.

Did God have some kind of alternative solution in his mind when he says “you shall not make for yourself an idol?

Brothers and Sisters,

Here is Good News. Are you ready for this? Are you ready to celebrate now?

We cannot make for ourselves carved images of God. But God can make one for us.

Listen to these words from New Testament.

(2 Cor. 4:6) For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

(Col 1:15) He is the image of the invisible God.

(Heb 1:3) He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of God's nature...

You see?

When we could not make for ourselves the image of God, God was carving his own image in Mary's womb. Christmas is the day that the greatest artist of the universe paints his own self-portrait for us.

(John 1:14) The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Oh, this text is exactly what it means. Jesus came to become our contact point between God and us.

Should I go on?

(John 1:18) No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [Him.] He has exegeted him.

(John 12:45) "And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me.

(John 14:9) Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and [yet] you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

(Col 2:9) For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

(John 10:30) "I and the Father are one."

And lastly, 1 John 5:20-21.

(1 John 5:20) And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

(1 John 5:21) Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

You see?

When we look at Jesus, the lamb who takes the sin of the world, that is what God looks like.

When we look at Jesus healing the wounds of the people, that is what God looks like.

When we look at Jesus hanging on the cross dying and saying "It is completed," that is exactly what God looks like.

In Jesus of Nazareth, we see the image..., the face of God.

Do not make for yourself an icon. You know why? Because I will send one for you, my perfect icon and that is Jesus of Nazareth.

Only Jesus can represent God without distorting God's image.

Only Jesus does not box God in.

Only Jesus truly opens our vision.

Jesus is true icon of God whom when we click him opens up a whole new spiritual reality and take us into the triangular relationship of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That is what God had in mind. God knew during all those time that we want to see God. No wonder Bible ends by saying the following words in last chapter of the Bible.

(Rev. 22:3) There shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him;

(Rev. 22:4) and they shall see God's face

Yes, we will see him face to face.

Until then, we are on this earth surrounded by images.

Turn on the T.V. and go to Barnes & Nobles and see the magazines, billboard, and go to New York City... We are bombarded with the images and icons.

Images from Hollywood, materialism, hero making of this nation, prosperity Gospel, sexual immorality... This is image-nation that constantly stimulates and distract our imagination with images after images.

Brothers and Sisters,

Do you want to see God?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the one and true image of God!