

“Home: Rethinking Life -Every Person Bears the Image of God”
John 14:17

I recall a workshop where we were asked to compare our self-assessment in ministry with feedback from others. The exercise highlighted a common "gap" – the difference between how we perceive ourselves and how others experience us. Today, I invite you to consider a deeper gap: the space between how you see yourself and how God sees you, and indeed, how God sees everyone.

Artist Nena Bryans' sculpture, “Make Way for the Image of God,” powerfully illustrates this. It depicts an angel leading a diverse procession of humanity.



This piece was inspired by a story Rabbi Abraham Heschel shared: Long ago, there was a Jewish school for young children. One day, in the middle of a lesson, a squadron of Roman soldiers, some on chariots and others in armor marched by the schoolhouse. Each regiment carried a statue of a different Roman god and as it passed by a slave would cry out, “Make way! Make way for Apollo! Make way! Make way for Aphrodite!” The school children were wide-eyed, and their teacher, seeing the powerful impression this display had made on his students, said to them: My dear children, don’t you know that in front of every human being there is also a parade of a thousand angels and each angel cries out to all who pass by: Make way! Make way for the Image of God.”



Bryans' sculpture brings this vision to life: an African American couple leading, a child with an ice cream cone, a person with a guide dog, a professional, embracing teenagers, a man with his coat draped, a mother with her children, and an elderly couple. This diverse tapestry reminds us of the inherent divine image within each person.

Jesus emphasized this very truth to his disciples in John 14:17: "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees this Spirit nor knows this Spirit. You know the Spirit because the Spirit abides with you, and will be in you."

Knowing his departure would bring fear, Jesus reminded them of the divine power already within. They had journeyed with him for three years, their understanding of the world transformed. No longer just fishermen or tax collectors, they grasped God's vision of love, justice, and peace. They witnessed miracles and learned that love, not violence, held the true power to redeem. As Jesus faced his impending end, he wanted them to remember the indwelling power of God.

The word "abide," used frequently in John's Gospel, is key. It speaks of a deep, shared life, an intimate knowing and being known – the very heart of the abundant life Jesus offered.

The invitation is clear: rethink the gift of life by recognizing the image and presence of God in ourselves and in every person we encounter. Shane Claiborne writes, "Where

human being are, God is...Wherever we crush a human being, we crush the image of God...God is inviting us to broaden God's kingdom by filling the world with the currency of love." He challenges us to gain "new eyes" to see Christ living within us (Galatians 2:20), allowing us to perceive the divine image reflected in everyone, even in our brokenness and belovedness."

Consider Claiborne's powerful reflections:

- In the murderers, we see our own capacity for hatred.
- In the addicts, we recognize our own struggles with dependence.
- In the saints, we glimpse our own potential for holiness.

Realizing our own complex nature – both flawed and beautiful – frees us to see that same complexity in others.

I urge you to begin each day with the conscious commitment to “make way for the image of God” within yourself and in every person you meet.

This echoes the famous story of “The Rabbi’s Gift.” A dying monastery receives a cryptic message from a visiting rabbi: “The Messiah is one of you.” This seemingly simple statement profoundly shifts the monks' perspective. They begin to see each other with new eyes, treating each other with unexpected kindness and respect, wondering if the person beside them could be the Messiah. This internal shift revitalizes their spirits, transforming their monastery into a thriving spiritual center once again.

May we too have the eyes to recognize the image of God in ourselves and in all those we encounter. Amen.