FIRST and ForMOST

First Presbyterian Church of Annandale **February 2018**

FROM YOUR PASTOR

"So, God created human beings as a shadow of (or) ***to show (tseh'-lem) God; as a shadow of*** (or) ***to show (tseh'-lem) God, human beings were created; God created human beings; male and female God created them." (Genesis 1:27 – Literal translation by Dr. Chris Looker)***

"'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts (higher) than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9 – NASB)

Recently, I preached a sermon that pointed out that the original Hebrew words used in Genesis 1: 27 ***(אֱלֹהִים בְּצַלְמ)*** or ***"b'tselem Elohim"*** may contain far more meaning than the traditional interpretations that have been attributed to these two words for centuries. For most of our lives, most Christians and Jews have been taught that God created human beings ***"in God's image".*** While there is nothing misleading or incorrect about this interpretation, the fact remains that

it is an interpretation and not necessarily a literal translation. Please let me try to explain the difference.

In Biblical Hebrew, the word ***בְּצֶלֶם*** or ***"tselem"*** actually comes from an unused root word meaning ***"to shade or shadow"*** or ***"to show".*** Now, if ***"tselem"*** literally meant ***"image",*** then that would certainly be consistent with the interpretation that scholars have attributed to Genesis 1:27 for centuries. However, if one allows for the more literal translation (not an interpretation) of the original word, then what can be learned from that? Perhaps nothing. On the other hand, perhaps a great deal.

What if one were to translate Genesis 1:27 as follows: ***"So, God created human beings as a shadow of God; as a shadow of God human beings were created..."?*** What does it mean to be created or made in the ***"shadow"*** of God?

Or, what if one were to translate Genesis 1:27 another way: ***"So, God created human beings to show that God exists; to show that God exists, human beings were created...."?*** What does it mean to be created ***"to show that God exists"***?

For one thing, neither of the more literal translations that I have presented definitively eliminates the possibility or probability that ***"God created human beings in God's own image."*** Rather, with a closer look, allowing oneself to merely think about substituting the words ***"shadow"*** or ***"show"*** for ***"image"*** just might help us do two important things.

First of all, by looking at the more literal meaning of the original Hebrew word that was used in Genesis 1:27, we might come to a better understanding of why it was that so many scholars over the years have decided to interpret the word ***"tselem"*** in this passage as ***"image".***

Secondly, by looking more closely at the literal interpretation of the Hebrew word that was originally used, we might come to a richer and deeper understanding of what God was trying to teach us by inspiring the author of Genesis to write using the word ***"tselem"*** instead of using another Hebrew word in this particular passage.

For example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is one of the Confessions in our church denomination's Constitution, we read this:

"There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, <u>the purest spirit</u>, invisible, without body, parts, or passions..." (Chapter 2)

Now, after reading this, some may ask the question, ***"If God is 'a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions', then how can***

human beings be created in the 'image' of a God who is pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts?"

What does the ***"image"*** of an invisible, bodiless, purely spiritual Being look like?

Of course, theologians and the faithful have been debating this question for thousands of years. And, for many, the temptation is to adopt and believe in a "god" who looks like one of the gods described in Roman or Greek mythology **or** simply create God in **OUR** own image.

Unfortunately, such idolatry is not Biblical, nor does it in any way glorify God. Rather, those who believe such things about "God" violate the first two Commandments of the One, True God (see Exodus 20: 1-17):

1. You shall have no other gods besides Me.;
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol…nor shall you bow down to worship any other God than Me;

Keeping all of this in mind, what if one allowed oneself to understand Genesis 1:27 in a more literal way, rather than one which was more interpretive? And, by doing this, could one better understand God's Word in passages like Isaiah 55:8-9?

"'For My thoughts are not your (i.e. human) thoughts, neither are your (human) ways My ways' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts (higher) than your thoughts."

So, if the One True God is **NOT** just a bigger and stronger human male or female ***"image",*** then wouldn't passages like this one from Isaiah allow us to be **less likely** to ***"see"*** or ***"understand"*** God as being more than just a material being (like we are)? And, if we were to understand and believe in a who is ***"a most pure and holy spirit",*** rather than some form of giant version of a human being, wouldn't it be easier for us to pray like Hannah did in 1 Samuel 2:2, ***"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you…"***?

With a more spiritual understanding of God, it seems more reasonable to me that we would be **less likely** to be tempted into worshipping false gods or creating God in **OUR** own image. And, it also seems more Biblically accurate and reasonable to me that by believing in and understanding God as ***"a most pure and holy spirit",*** the temptation to use our imaginations to construct a false and misleading idolic image of the One True God is greatly lessened.

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Isn't it possible that when we understand and accept that we as human beings ***"created in the shadow of God",*** we humble ourselves and glorify God?

Isn't it like my saying, ***"My ability to throw a football is just a mere 'shadow' of Tom Brady's or Ben Roethlisberger's."*** And, couldn't we interpret Genesis 1:27 as meaning that we have been created in the ***"shadow"*** of God…that we are so much less than God…that we are not like God. Aren't we less likely to ***"create God in our OWN image"*** if we open up our own personal theological viewpoints to a broader and more literal translation of Genesis 1:27? And, if that is the case, wouldn't we be more likely to accept our rightful place in all of creation?

And, what is our rightful place in all of creation? Isn't it to ***"show that God exists"*** in a way that no other animal or plant can possibly reveal? As the Westminster Shorter Catechism clearly states at the very beginning, isn't our rightful place in all of creation to ***"glorify God and enjoy God forever"?*** After all, we can talk, reason, think, write, plan, act, and express ourselves in ways that are totally unique among living things. Could a fish or chimpanzee have ever been able to be inspired by God to write the book of Genesis or the Gospel of Matthew? Could an eagle, elephant, or whale have ever evolved to the point where they could write and preach a sermon **<u>or</u>** ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all of creation*** (Mark 16: 15)? Could a chicken or dolphin have ever evolved to the point where they could share with ***"all of creation"*** how glorious, awesome, powerful, creative, merciful, loving, and forgiving God really is?

No. And, for better or worse, that is the unique and God-given place for all human beings in all of creation.

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So, how are we doing when it comes to fulfilling and living up to our rightful place in all of creation? How humble are we? How are we ***"showing"*** the world that God exists? How are we sharing the ***"image"*** of God with others?

Are we merely asking others to look at us in our physical form and saying, ***"This is what God is like",*** as if it's in any way important, spiritually edifying, theologically sound or Biblically accurate to believe that God actually has arms, legs, hair, eyes, ears, and a mouth? **<u>Or,</u>** is it possible to get beyond our love for and addiction to materialism and physicality to humbly and faithfully believe that the One True God is ***"infinite in being and perfection, the purest spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions…"***?

The Bible was originally written in Ancient Hebrew and Koine Greek. And, being able to read and understand it as it was first written down on paper is very helpful to comprehending the "original intent" of the authors, who in the case of the Bible, were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

In so many instances, the English translation of the Bible can be one-dimensional and incomplete. After all, it was not originally written in English. However, this does not make the English translation of the Bible worthless or useless. Such a belief would be absurd! Rather, it means that, for us, the English translation of the Bible is the starting point for our faith. And, any further meaning that can be derived from the original languages should be appreciated and valued as a truly great blessing.

May God continue to bless you in your walk of faith.

Your Friend and Pastor,

PREACHING SCHEDULE FOR FEBRUARY 2018

February 4, 2018 ***Service of Holy Communion***

Title of the Sermon

"How Can I Know the Heart of God?" (Part 1)
(Continuing our Sermon Series on the Movie, "THE SHACK")

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

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February 11, 2018

Title of the Sermon

"How Can I Know the Heart of God?" (Part 2)
(Continuing our Sermon Series on the Movie, "THE SHACK")

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

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February 18, 2018

Ms. Stella Lee, Preaching

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February 25, 2018

Title of the Sermon

"Is Deep and Real Forgiveness Possible?"

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

MEET FELLOW CHRISTIANS

MEET VALENTINE ON ASH WEDNESDAY

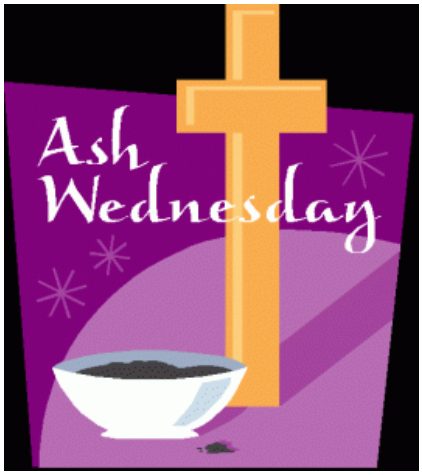
By Marta Strada

Ever since the 5th century AD, Christians celebrated Valentine's Day in the middle of February, supposedly to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine's death around A.D. 270. In an effort to lead people to faith in Christ and away from pagan holidays, Christians decided to celebrate Valentine's Day on the same day as the pagan celebration of Lupercalia, a fertility festival dedicated to the Roman god of agriculture, Faunus, as well as to Romulus and Remus.

There is a legend that in the third century there was a priest in Rome named Valentine who defied Emperor Claudius II's decision that single men made better soldiers than those with wives, and outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing this injustice, defied Claudius, for which he was put to death. There are also stories that Valentine was killed because he attempted to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons. A legend tells us that an imprisoned Valentine sent the first "valentine" greeting when he fell in love with his jailor's daughter. Supposedly he wrote her a letter signed "From your Valentine." Thanks to these stories, we see Valentine as a sympathetic, heroic and romantic figure. By the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

During the Valentine festival, members of the order of priests called Luperci, gathered at a sacred cave where supposedly the infants Romulus and Remus had been cared for by a she-wolf or lupa. The priests would sacrifice a goat and strip its hide. Then

they would dip the strips into the sacrificial blood. Walking on the streets, they gently touched both women and crop fields with the goat hide. The Roman women welcomed this practice, because they believed it made them more fertile. Later in the day, all the young women put their names in a big urn. Each of the city's bachelors would then choose a name and seek to become the woman's friend, which often ended in marriage. This practice was called *Lupercalia.* It was still active when Christianity started, but was outlawed by the end of the 5th century. Pope Gelasius declared February 14th Valentine's Day, but it took centuries untill the day became definitively associated with love. In the Middle Ages, people in England and France believed that February 14 was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that Valentine's Day should be a day for romance. The oldest known valentine still in existence is a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London.



This year we have another special event on February 14: it is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. It is observed by many Christian churches, including the First Presbyterian Church of Annandale. On Ash Wednesday ashes are blessed. They are made from palm branches that were blessed on the previous year's Palm Sunday. They are placed on the heads of participants while saying *"Repent, and believe in the Gospel"* or *"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return".* There are various ways of

placing the ashes on worshippers' heads. The two most common ways are using the ashes to make a cross on the forehead and sprinkling the ashes over the crown of the

head. In the old days, the ashes were strewn only over men's heads, while they were placed on women's foreheads, as their heads were covered.

Will we have a conflict on February 14, 2018? Is it going to be a happy day, when we celebrate Valentine's Day with family and friends? Or will it be a sad day, when we remember that we have come from the dust of the earth and to the earth's dust we shall return? In my eyes, there is no conflict. Valentine symbolizes love -- love between human beings. But love is not limited to human beings – God's love for us is always there - much stronger than human love. And the ashes are a reminder that we should repent and believe in the Gospel – the Gospel that emphasizes God's love for us! Yes, we can celebrate Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday together and thank our Heavenly Father for His great love!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Kathleen A. McDermott ~ February 7
Sarah Angelina Javed ~ February 13
Dorothy Sheffert ~ February 26

WANT TO TRY POTTERY?

The Potter's House is taking new students. Learn how to make your own pottery under the supervision of experienced Pastor Chris Looker. Classes are held on Wednesdays from 10 am to noon. Just $15 per 2 hour lesson. All supplies provided. Call 703-941-3300 for more info or to sign up.

THE PHYSICAL LAWS:
THE LAW OF NUTRITIONAL FRUGALITY

Introduction - Greg Anderson's first book was entitled **THE CANCER CONQUEROR**. He wrote the book after living through the near death ordeal of suffering from metastatic lung cancer. After removing one of his lungs his doctors told him that he was going to die within 30 days. That was in 1984 and he is still writing. He knew that people had survived cancer and so he set out to find out what they had in common. His books are based on his findings and his own personal lifestyle that evolved as a result of his findings. This book, **THE 22 (NON-NEGOTIABLE) LAWS OF WELLNESS**, is a summation of the principles on not only how he lives his life but a guide for wellness for us all.

In the *Introduction* to The 22 Laws, he says that the term *wellness* is one of the most powerful words in the English language and one of the most important ideas of our time but it is also one of the least understood words. He says that wellness is more than a "medical fix" but is a way of living – *a lifestyle sensitive and responsive to all the dimensions of body, mind, and spirit, an approach to life we each design to achieve our highest potential for well-being now and forever.*

I mentioned earlier that Anderson structures his book around eight different groups of laws: Part One. **THE UNIVERSAL LAWS**. Part Two. **THE PHYSICAL LAWS**. Part Three. **THE EMOTIONAL LAWS**. Part Four. **THE SOCIAL LAWS**. Part Five. **THE INTELLECTUAL LAWS**. Part Six. **THE VOCATIONAL LAWS**. Part Seven. **THE SPIRITUAL LAWS**. Part Eight. **The Greatest Law**. This article will be on the second of the three **PHYSICAL LAWS**, the LAW OF NUTRITIONAL FRUGALITY.

As in my last article about physical activity I would like to briefly share my own history and personal experience with the topic of nutritional frugality. As a child I was always a very picky eater and would frequently get stomach aches after eating. I would get hungry but would "fill up" fast. Weight was never a problem for me although I cannot say that I always ate the most wholesome food. I loved sugar! My favorite breakfast cereal was Sugar Corn Pops, a food that was already laden with sugar out of the box but I would always add a heaping spoonful or two more. I would use my spoon to scrape the remaining sugar out of the bottom of my cereal bowl. I did the same with iced tea. I would add so much sugar it couldn't all dissolve. But, no problem, I would manage the get the sugar in the bottom of the glass after I finished drinking all the tea. Incidentally, I did have a lot of cavities in my teeth.

Going off to college and getting away from home, my eating patterns changed some. I was still a picky eater but no longer ate so much sweet cereal. I still remained

thin. When I got my first job and started learning to cook for myself I remember my staple for my evening meal was Clark's Chopped Steaks, instant mashed potatoes and mixed frozen vegetables. I never did eat a lot of carbohydrates, and since I was trying to watch my money and pay off a new VW beetle I did not eat out that often. I continued to remain thin. It seems like I could take food or leave it. I would still get stomach aches and food was not that important in my life.

After my third year of teaching I wound up in the Army. We ran everywhere we went during basic training and, even though my appetite picked up because of all the physical activity, I still remained thin. When I graduated from Basic Training I weighed 158 pounds. Being a little over 6' 1'' tall I was still thin.

All through my first tour of duty I remained thin. Fast forward 11 years which included several years of teaching, 4 years of Seminary, and coming back into the Army as a Chaplain, I had gained more weight moving up from 158 lbs to around 178 lbs. Even after gaining 20 lbs I still appeared on the thin side. My appetite had improved because the Army had changed and we were doing rigorous physical training at least 3 days a week. My stomach aches had disappeared and my appetite had also increased. I remember having unit social functions while being stationed in Germany and eating a lot of German food, which was heavy on carbohydrates. I remember one function in particular having a Wiener Schnitzel and fries that covered my plate, and eating it all. But because I was so physically active my weight stayed right around 180 lbs.

My last overseas assignment was in the Netherlands between 1995 and 1998. This time I spent more of the duty day in an office setting and I no longer ran with a PT formation. When it came to physical training I was on my own. Because I spent so much time in an office setting, I cut back on my meals. I noticed that my weight was trying to creep up, my uniform started to feel a little snug. Also, I was diagnosed with increasing blood pressure and started taking medication for that. I do remember when I was sent down to the training center in Hohenfels, Germany, to get "trained up" to go to Bosnia, I was with a group of other soldiers. We stayed outside and very physically active for the three days I was there. I also remember every time we went to the dining facility, I was always starving and I ate a great deal. I also observed that, even though I ate a great deal at a particular meal, when it was time for the next meal I was starving again. This was because of all the physical activity. I was never sent to Bosnia and when I returned back to my office job I cut way back on my food intake. I was just not burning the calories like I had been when we were out in the field.

It was while in the Netherlands from 1995 to 1998, that I discovered the writing of Greg Anderson. I read his first book, **The Cancer Conqueror,** and wound up ultimately buying other books by him. I would read his books and then put them away.

Fast forward again to my third tour in the Army, this time serving the Wounded Warriors at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I was there from 2008 – 2011. By this time I was up to around 200 lbs and, apart from walking around the WRAMC campus, did almost no physical activity. During my second year there, on 1 June 2009, I experienced a heart attack. It was during a follow up visit after having a stent placed that the cardiologist got my attention. He said that I had normal heart blockage for someone my age. My initial response was anger. I told myself that I had been drinking low fat milk and eating a banana with my cereal, etc., and was trying to eat healthy generally following the guidelines published by the FDA. And, shortly after I was discharged, I had 20 stitches in my lower lip following surgery to remove a squamous cell carcinoma. Between the heart attack and the lip surgery I started trying to find the truth in planning a program to get healthy and remain healthy. I bought and read books like **Life Without Bread, Younger Next Year, How I Gave Up My Low-fat Diet and Lost 30 Lbs, How To Outsmart Your Cancer, The Maker's Diet.** I ultimately returned to Greg Anderson and his little book **The 22 (Non-Negotiable) Laws of Wellness.** Anderson's guidance is very simple and easy to follow if you will just do it, as he says. And, the important thing, is that this has worked for him and continues to work for him. Here was a person who was literally at death's door, (his doctors told him so), but he has outlined a simple comprehensive program that works. The important thing to notice is that he says these 22 Laws are really Non-Negotiable, each and every one.

He introduces the chapter on THE LAW OF NUTRITIONAL FRUGALITY with the story of Luigi Cornaro, a fifteenth-century nobleman from Venice, Italy. Apparently Cornaro had some kind of eye opening experience because, according to Anderson, *"…after living a youth filled with overindulgence of every kind, Cornaro resolved that he would mend his ways, pursue moderation in all things, and try to survive until he reached the age of at least one hundred."*

Anderson continues:

"*His success was outstanding. The average life expectance of fifteenth-century Italians was about thirty-five years. Luigi lived to be 103! Moreover, he remained active, clear thinking, and creative, recording his life experiences in detail right to the end.*

The cornerstone of Luigi Cornaro's success? A spare diet of fruits and vegetables. Cornaro lived on the equivalent of about fifteen hundred calories per day from the age of thirty-seven onward. This honored the ancient Greek and Roman belief in a frugal diet as the secret of longevity."

While he says that the experience of one fifteenth-century person does not make for scientific proof or the basis for twenty-first-century health policy, he did say that virtually every person he observed who was trying to pursue their own wellness journey,

practiced frugal eating. While he never defines "frugal diet" per se, his implied definition is "a spare diet of fruits and vegetables" and "equivalent to about 1500 calories per day".

He says that most people upon hearing the word "diet" have two objections. The first is based on lack of willpower and goes something like this; "I've tried countless diets and can't stay with any one of them." They think they will fail. The second objection has to do with taste. The argument goes, "I like too many good and tasty dishes and I'm not going to settle for a bland diet no matter how good it is for me." As is the case when Anderson presents his individual laws of wellness he calls for a "paradigm shift", a new way of viewing the situation. Here he says that he is not calling for sticking to some rigid diet, but he is calling for a new way of seeing ourselves, a new way of life, a new outlook. I'll let him say it in his own words:

There's no reason that nutritious can't be delicious. The core message of the Law of Nutritional Frugality is simple: eat a variety of unprocessed foods, in moderate amounts, during at least three meals, including breakfast, combined with a smart afternoon snack, while drinking eight glasses of pure water and taking a broad-spectrum vitamin-and-mineral supplement each day.

He continues:

That's not difficult. It takes no monumental willpower. Every bite can be delicious. The biggest change is in our thinking. If we change our thinking about eating, we'll change our life. Just a few of the rewards of following the Law of Nutritional Frugality include:

- *more energy and less fatigue:*
- *better weight control;*
- *a better chance of maintaining proper cholesterol levels;*
- *a better chance of preventing a variety of diseases;*
- *increased self-esteem.*

Anderson reminds the reader of the first law of wellness, the Law of Esprit, living life with joy. He says that the trick is to actually eat this way and enjoy it. If it can't be done with joy, we've missed wellness. He reminds us that this approach to diet and nutrition is not a problem; it's a decision. He concludes by saying that changing our diet is something we choose to do and not something we are forced to do. Instead of dreading it, try saying, "Here's another thing I get to do to help myself! Great!"

My next article will be on THE LAW OF MINIMAL MEDICAL INVASIVENESS.

Submitted by Bill Jokela, Parish Associate

CONGRATULATIONS!

Mitchell Youmans graduated with his Master's degree in Civil Engineering from VA Tech on 21 Dec 2017. He will be starting his first job at Schnabel in Sterling, VA, when he returns.

MESSAGE TO THE CONGREGATON

Dearest Congregation Members,

This message comes to all ALL of you! I'm sure we have members who could write an article for *FIRST and ForMOST*, telling us about an interesting experience, or some other thoughts you would like to share with our fellow members. You may share them with your friends and neighbors – we are your friends too! Come, write something for our newsletter! I am sure all of us would love it!

Your Editor, Marta Strada

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

After Dr. Chris Looker had opened the meeting with prayer, Ms. Stella Lee handed out a list of supplies needed for Family Ministries. She reported that her work with the children went very well, they were even willing to sing at the beginning of Worship Service on Sunday. Elder Sandy Mori reminded the Session that funds were needed to be able to purchase start up supplies for the Christian Childcare Center.

Dr. Looker reported that the Special Adult Church School Class, *"The Shack"*, will be a 5-week class, held on January 7, 14, 28, and February 4, 11, 2018, immediately after Worship Service, from 11:30 AM to 12:45 PM.

ORGAN CONCERT IN FEBRUARY

On February 25, 2018, at 4:00 PM, organist Brian Mathias will present an organ concert.

Come and enjoy it!

Dr. Brian Mathias is Adjunct Professor of Music at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. His responsibilities include teaching applied organ and carillon, as well as courses in hymn playing, keyboard harmony and improvisation. He also taught courses on a variety of topics, including organ registration, organ literature, advanced pedal technique, and music theory. Among Dr. Mathias's recent solo performances are recitals at the Salt Lake Tabernacle and the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Washington National Cathedral, and the Texas A&M International University in Laredo, Texas.