

When All Around Us Are Turkeys, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 26071125
Colossians 1:11-20 and Matthew 23:37-39
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Thanksgiving Day is an annual orgy of gobbling and stuffing. That day and for days afterward, we're surrounded by turkey. It reminds me of a poster I once saw which says, "It's hard to soar with eagles when you're surrounded by turkeys." It goes without saying, it's hard to soar when you're stuffed with turkey!

The phrase about eagles and turkeys produces images in our minds: the freedom, release, and majesty of an eagle, and the earth-bounded and scratchy ignorance of the turkey.

Our thinking and living are filled with images. What is your image of God? How do you picture God? Our image of God in large part determines our faith. It makes a difference in how we live our lives. An early image I had of God was of an old man with a beard, seated on a throne with a book checking people off into columns of good and evil, to be rewarded or punished. Many, when they think of God, see Michelangelo's painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of God giving life to the first human. The scripture reading from Colossians contains five images of God: Father, Glorious power, Strong, Rescuer, and Creator.

We're going to take a journey through the Bible to see the many and varied images of God portrayed there. In Revelation 4 and 5, God is seated on a throne with a scroll in his right hand. In Revelation 18:8, God is a judge. It makes a difference what judge we picture. Is it a judge like Clark Brown played by Henry Gibson on Boston Legal? Or, a judge like Sandra Day O'Connor?

In Genesis 1, God is a speaking Creator: "Let there be light!" In Genesis 3, God is a walker in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. In Genesis 15:1, God is a shield: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield."

In Exodus, God is a legislator, providing the people with laws. In Exodus 15:26, God is a healer. In Exodus 34:11, God is a mighty warrior. "See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites." We want God to be a mighty warrior and destroy those who threaten us, but we want God to be merciful and kind when it comes to our own sins.

In Psalm 2, God is to be feared. "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.' I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are all who take refuge in him."

The image of God the king may have been adequate for people who had kings to rule them. We don't have kings. We have presidents, fallible presidents who are elected to office by fallible people. We have no lords or masters. We have bosses and we have chairpersons and CEO's. We cannot box God into one or two confining images.

The Bible has additional images that you probably have not thought of lately. God the lightbulb: 23And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its

light.”¹ God the many or God the split personality: “Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”² God the wrestler. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with God all night. God is jealous in Exodus 20:4: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Some of us have difficulty thinking of God in feminine terms, but there are a number of feminine images in the Bible. In Isaiah 42:14, God “will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant.” In Isaiah 49:15, God is like a nursing mother, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” The Psalmist pictures God like his mother. “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.”³

The image of God as a mother bear is not so kind and gentle in Hosea. “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart.”⁴

In Second Esdras, God is presented as both male and female: “Thus says the Lord Almighty: Have I not entreated you as a father entreats his sons or a mother her daughters or a nurse her children, so that you should be my people and I should be your God, and that you should be my children and I should be your father? I gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”⁵

God is a loving parent in Hosea 11:3-4: “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.”

We are restricted in faith if we cannot open up our imagery. The fullness of God is much fuller than our thinking. Listen to this image of God as an eagle in Deuteronomy 32:11: “As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him; no foreign god was with him.” The mother eagle, in teaching her eaglets to fly, takes them up high and drops them so they have to flap their wings. If they can’t fly, she will swoop down and protect them from crashing into the ground and carry them on her back. Isn’t that a poignant image to remember about God? God always wants us to fly on our own like baby eagles, but if we can’t make it, God will swoop down and protect us from crashing. If our image of God is an eagle, we will never be held down by the turkeys around us. God is always challenging us to soar, yet catching us when we fall.

Colossians says Jesus is the image of God.⁶ God is kind, loving, and determined, but this is not a complete or adequate image. Do not get caught in the trap of imagining God to be exactly like Jesus. All of God cannot be shoehorned into Christ. We are definitely off base if we believe God to be male simply because Jesus was a male. That image would cause us to value maleness

¹Revelation 21:23

²Genesis 11:7

³Psalms 131

⁴Hosea 13:8

⁵2 Esdras 1:28-30

⁶Colossians 1:15

more than femaleness. God values all of God's creation.

Matthew quotes Jesus saying he is like a mother hen: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"⁷ Are we like those chickens, refusing to be sheltered, cared for, and guided by God? Are we refusing to live under the same wings as other chickens?

We humans are made in the image of God. That makes us special. That also makes a difference in what we picture God to be like. We will reflect our image of God in the actions we take and the words we say. None of the images that we talked about this morning is best or most adequate. None describes God fully. All of them point to what God is like.

Colossians presents Jesus as a sort of glue: "in him all things hold together."⁸ Colossians helps us see what stance we take in relation to God. This is a good message for the Sunday after Thanksgiving: "Giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light."⁹

No matter what our image of God— a wise judge on a throne, a woman giving birth, an eagle protecting its young, or a mother hen, we can be thankful for God's love and care for us. Broaden your image of God, for that image will be reflected in the way you live your life. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.¹⁰

Now, focus on the cross before us and fix this image of all the power and creativity of God as I read this Gospel reading for the Reign of Christ Sunday.

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."¹¹

⁷Matthew 23:37

⁸Colossians 1:10

⁹Colossians 1:12

¹⁰Colossians 1:15, 20

¹¹Luke 23:33-38