

Sermon Series: Imago Dei



#4 Who will fix us? – Hebrews 4:14-16

Do you have a roadside assist account for your vehicle?

Nowadays, when buying a new car, the dealer will offer you free **roadside assist** for 12 months.

But if your car dealer offers you a 5-10 year roadside assist, may I suggest this vehicle you're buying may be prone to breaking down! 😊



Last week I addressed the question, “Why are we humans **so faulty?**” Human **hubris** and our common lust for **power** over others universally raises questions about human beings. Despite being so good and creative, there’s **something not quite right with us**. We looked into the first three chapters of The Book of Genesis where its stories tell of a fundamental change to our originally harmonious relationship with God, with each other, and with the cosmos.

Questions of an **existential** nature commonly arise when life is not quite right. Marvel’s *WandaVision* portrays this well in Season 1, Episode 1. Wanda and Vision awake to a world in which they are **misfits**. Through a litany of funny and banal failures and mishaps while trapped in a 1960’s sitcom, they are moved to ask themselves: Why are we here? How did we get here? Why don’t we fit in? Who will help us work it out?



REFLECT

Do you know someone wrestling with similar questions right now?

- Descartes’ would point to **reason** as our rescuer,
- Freud would prescribe **talking** about our problems to solve them,
- Various Popes would urge them to trust in the **Church**,
- Sadly, neither **education, therapy, religion**, nor many and varied **political theories** ever eradicated the misuse of **pride** and **power** that so often **dominates, divides** and **damages** communities.

The Bible redirects our question from “**What** can **we** do to address our situation?” to a **question of “Who** may be **fit** to **help us?”**

In the words of Roger Waters, “Is there **anybody out there?”**

Psalms 24 gives us an example of the questions asked by ancient Israel:

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in God’s holy place?

The Psalmist goes on to question just **who** might be pure and clean enough, fit for purpose to **represent humanity** before God who is holy, and reconcile us to God; to make us one with God?

The **Gospel of John** is a great place to start for anyone who is searching for one who might common **human plight**. It begins...

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... ³ Through him all things were made ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind...

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...

Note some of the important details about **who** this passage speaks of:

- Christ’s divine **origins** are from before the beginning of creation (1),
- The same divine person was **involved in** creating human life (3,4),
- Jesus is God **taking on human life** in its fulness **took** (incarnation),
- God’s glory was witnessed in Jesus’ death for sins (14, see 17:5), and
- Jesus, both divine and human, **made the way for us** to be right with God, and one with God (vs. 12)

What **we are not able to** do to fix our broken relationships with God, with one another, and with the cosmos, God **provided** in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews (in the New Testament) also points to the “who” as important to our search for wholeness and completeness. It does so with

interesting references to **the Imago Dei**. It makes the case that the image of God originally said to be in us¹ is no longer as it was.²

By contrast, The Letter to the Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the one we should look to.³ He is the unique and perfect image of God. **Hebrews 1** tells us...

³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (Heb. 1:3-4)

Note the theology of **Imago Dei** woven throughout the description...

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Note too how Jesus' **perfect representation** of God is **linked to his sacrificial love** that enables us to be cleansed of our sins...

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- Jesus is the **perfect representation of God**,
- Jesus is also the **righteous representative** of humanity before God,
- And, therefore, Jesus is **perfectly fit** to deal with the breakdown between humanity and God, and between us and the rest of creation.

REFLECT

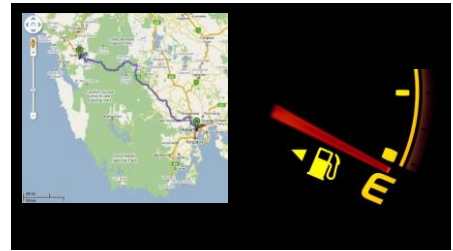
Have you ever needed just the right person, at just the right time and place?

¹ Genesis 1:26,27

² Hebrews 2:5-8

³ Hebrews 2:9

Penne and I once took our two kids on a driving holiday across Tasmania years ago. I arrogantly insisted we would need only one tank of fuel to make it from Hobart to Queenstown. “We’ll make it”, I said, against all obvious calculations.



But come nightfall on a Sunday, the “**fuel empty**” sign flashing on the dashboard, engine turned off, rolling down the hills to save fuel. I desperately needed the **right person at the right time suited to this dilemma**. Only a person with a vehicle or a full fuel can could save me. I needed someone **fit for purpose** to help me.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is **fit for purpose**: perfectly suited to dealing with our **common spiritual plight**.⁴ Hebrews 4, verses 14-15, re Jesus says...

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven... let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **[identify fully with our plight]**⁵, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.⁶

REFLECT

Tell me, do those people known to you **searching for answers** to the ills of humanity, do they look to their own resources, or are they looking outside themselves? The Bible urges us to look to **whom God has provided**, and to thankfully receive the benefits of what Jesus **has already done** for us.⁷

The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1 of Jesus:

¹⁵ The Son is the **image** of the invisible God... ¹⁹ God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace

⁴ Romans 3:23 says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. The writer to the Hebrews agrees that the Imago Dei, once so good in humanity, is less than perfect in us today (an understatement!). But note to whom the writer points as the solution to this problem. We read in Hebrews chapter 2:

8...at present we do not see everything [under the care and stewardship of humanity]. 9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

⁵ “sympathize with our weaknesses” NRSV – weaknesses may refer to our struggles or sins, but also indicates that Jesus knew exactly what our situation is like, yet not succumbing as we do

⁶ Hebrews 2:17 puts this in the positive tense

⁷ The writer to the Hebrews says, though we are not quite right, “we see Jesus”, “looking to Jesus”

through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies... But now God has reconciled you... do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Let's not make the error of thinking of the church as we do a car **repair shop**. We must not think simplistically about "fixing" human beings ⁱ as we would with machines. Instead, the Gospel of Jesus tells us God **sent a person**: the right person, at the right time, fit to serve



humanity in its deepest time of need. Jesus Christ as the key to the door towards human wholeness and connectedness; even amidst the imperfections and breakdowns that occur in life.

Spiritual Roadside Assist?

We could say the writer to the Hebrews points to a **spiritual roadside assist** for pilgrims on the journey of faith. In Hebrews 4:16 he says...

¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us **in our time of need**.

The picture here relates to the Old Testament symbol of atonement, the **mercy-seat** of God.⁸ FF Bruce wrote that for Christians, the picture of Christ as high priest seated on the **heavenly throne of grace** ...

"...speaks of a [reconciliation]ⁱⁱ completed **not in token** but in fact, and the constant availability of divine aid in all their need."⁹

Archaeologists discovered an ancient inscription in Greek that testifies: **"received timely help"**.

The road trip I spoke of earlier ended with a similar positive testimony. I received timely help. Driving on empty with no hope of making it to town, we came across a man walking along the road. He didn't have a vehicle. He didn't have a can of fuel. But he was just the right person, at just the right time,

⁸ Hebrews chapter 9 (vs. 5) summarizes the ceremonies of which the mercy-seat was an important symbol of reconciliation with God, and contrasts the superiority of Jesus' as "high priest"

⁹ NICOT *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p86

because he told us, “I know a guy”! He knew the man in the pub who had the key to the closed petrol station. I received undeserved, but very **timely help**.

ACT

The Gospel of Jesus tells us God sent His Son as the **timely help** for our deepest, shared, human dilemma. But Hebrews 4 speaks of such help as constantly available to the person with faith in Christ. We are granted a kind of **spiritual roadside assist** for the journey of faith and life.

Anywhere, anytime, in any condition of life, we have free and unfettered **access** to the **mercy** and **grace** of God when we pray, through Christ. Whenever breakdowns in life occur, whenever we fail ourselves or others, or whenever we are victims of the failings of others, God gives grace. God covers the sins committed, turns us towards love and peace, and empowers us to change our ways. Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us enables us to come to God in prayer with **confidence**. When we ask, grace and mercy will abound to reconcile us with God, and to bring peace to communities, and to lead us towards wholeness.

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us **in our time of need**.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ **Simplistic** ideas of “fixing” humans can be **damaging**, as was proved recently in the expose of so-called Gay Conversion Therapies applied by some religious groups, **now, thankfully outlawed** in our State. Therefore, we must be careful to clarify any ideas we have that the Gospel of Jesus might “fix” human beings. We must express ourselves carefully.

ⁱⁱ **Propitiation** [\[N\]](#) [\[B\]](#)

that by which God is rendered propitious, i.e., by which it becomes consistent with his character and government to pardon and bless the sinner. The propitiation does not procure his love or make him loving; it only renders it consistent for him to exercise his love towards sinners.

In [Romans 3:25](#) and [Hebrews 9:5](#) (A.V., "mercy-seat") the Greek word *hilasterion* is used. It is the word employed by the LXX. (Greek Old Testament) translators in [Exodus 25:17](#) and elsewhere as the equivalent for the Hebrew kapporeth, which means "covering," and is used of the lid of the ark of the covenant ([Exodus 25:21](#) ; [30:6](#)). This Greek word (*hilasterion*) came to denote not only the mercy-seat or lid of the ark, but also propitiation or reconciliation by blood. On the great day of atonement, the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifice he offered for all the people within the veil and sprinkled with it the "mercy-seat," and so made propitiation.

In [1 John 2:2](#) ; [4:10](#) , Christ is called the "propitiation for our sins." Here a different Greek word is used (*hilasmos*). Christ is "the propitiation," because as our representative and as our substitute and assuming our obligations he expiated our guilt, covered it, by the vicarious sacrifice of himself he endured. (Compare [Hebrews 2:17](#) , where the expression "make reconciliation" of the A.V. is more correctly in the RSV "make propitiation.")