

God's Dog?
Luke 10:25-37

Apparently it's been scientifically proven that dogs often look like their owners!

Now I haven't seen the studies so I can't vouch for whether this is actually true or not . . .

But it did make me wonder . . . it got me thinking, in a dyslexic sort of way, . . . is it the same for people and their God . . . do people look like their God? And, if they do, when someone looks at you and me, what sort of God do they see?

So, this morning we're going to do a little bit of a scientific experiment. To find out what God looks like. I think, to get straight to the heart of the matter we need to ask ourselves the question: 'Who is my God?' Who is *your* God?

Well, it's pretty obvious, isn't it? I mean, we all know the answer to that, don't we? God is almighty . . . God is three-in-one . . . Father, Son and Holy Spirit . . . God is creator . . . God is redeemer . . . we recite these things in our statements of faith every Sunday . . . so often we don't really have to think about that question too much . . . we just know the answer. We know who God is!

Or, do we?

Who is your God? That's the question . . . perhaps the most important question we could ever be asked: 'Who is your God?'

Allow me to produce Exhibit A for our scientific experiment: our text for today. A certain lawyer stands up to test Jesus. This is not a lawyer in the modern sense of the word . . . this is a Bible expert . . . he knows the Scripture inside and out. This bloke is the real deal . . . he's got it together . . . he's honest . . . he's sincere . . . he's certainly not the baddy he's often made out to be. He just wants to get things right!

Because *he* knows who God is . . . he knows what God's like. And, so, he asks some good questions . . . like, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' . . . life with God . . . this bloke knows God's promises . . . this is what life is all about . . . everything else pales in significance. It's a good question . . . and, prompted by Jesus, he gets to answer his own question . . . it's a good answer too . . . it's the *right* answer: 'Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour'. The two great commandments! But, that answer still leaves the door open to interpretation, so, just to make extra sure he's got it right, he asks another question . . . 'And, who is my God?' No, he doesn't ask that question, does he? I wonder why? Why doesn't he ask *that* question? Does he think he doesn't need any help keeping *that* commandment? Or, is it so obvious it's not worth asking . . . he knows who God is!

Or, does he?

Who do we see when we look at this man? Do you, like me, see someone who wants to get things right . . . he wants to do things right . . . he wants to be right? Which is not a bad thing. Don't we want that too? If I'm having an operation I'd want my surgeon to be like that! If I'm flying overseas I want the aircraft mechanics to be like that. Aren't we all like that, really? We want to be right. Us Lutherans have a proud history of making sure we get it right . . . isn't that why it takes so long to change anything in the church? We want to get things right . . . that's what God wants, yes? We want to be right. That's not so bad is it?

But, if people look like their God, what do we see of God in this man? And, what do others see of God in us? Do we . . . do *they* . . . see a God who needs to be right . . . a God who needs to be righteous . . . a God of commandments . . . a God of prescription and restriction? A God who is perfect . . . and holy . . . and just . . . and right. Is that who God is?

Well . . . possibly! But, let's reserve judgment until we've seen Exhibit B.

Jesus tells a story . . . and Jesus' stories are usually worth listening to. You know this one well . . . the man on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . . attacked, beaten and left for dead by robbers. A priest comes by and passes on the other side . . . a Levite does the same . . . the good, religious types . . . not unlike the lawyer! . . . not unlike us?! They came along and ignore the man and pass by on the other side!

Did they do the right thing? Ignoring the man in need? Did they do the right thing? Are we not interested in that question? Perhaps it's not as black and white as it seems? We could discuss that and debate that . . . because that's what people who need to be right like to do . . . we talk about the merits of right and wrong . . . we try to work it out . . . so we can justify ourselves, whatever the outcome! But, the story doesn't try to work it out . . . Jesus makes no comment about who's *right*!

Instead, Jesus tells us about a Samaritan . . . an outsider . . . who comes along, like the other two, but who doesn't ignore the man . . . and doesn't walk on the other side . . . a Samaritan who comes near to the man, lifts him up, soothes his injuries and bandages his wounds, then puts him on his donkey and carries him to an inn, paying for his accommodation and whatever future care the man might need.

If people look like their God, what do we see of God in this Samaritan? Don't we see a God we don't expect? A God who sees something more important than right and wrong? A God who doesn't stay away from the messiness of our lives? A God who comes near . . . to us! A God who sees our brokenness . . . our desperate need . . . and doesn't question the risks? A God who gives up his own comfort for our well-being? A God who hangs on a cross! A God who says, 'Whatever it takes, I'll pay'? A God who offers healing . . . through wine and bread. But, most of all . . . in this Samaritan, don't we see a God whose whole instinct . . . whose whole movement . . . whose whole being is compassion . . . suffering with . . . journeying with . . . dwelling with . . . human beings . . . like us.

Is this our God? Or, to ask the question in a different way: 'Which of those three, do you think, was God to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

When we've got that question right, then we will go and do likewise.

Amen.

Pastor John Strelan
St John's Lutheran Church, Unley
Pentecost 5, 2025