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## **Imago DEI: Prismatic and Fabulous**

Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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This week, quite naturally, I've had rainbows on the mind. Aren't you glad that we live in a world where rainbows exist? I'm not sure we really appreciate this. How advanced have we become as a civilization and yet we are still mesmerized by rainbows?! You are, just as I am. I will pull the car over just to get a picture of a rainbow so I can send to the family. At the end of any major storm, we all become rainbow chasers! Oh, we understand the science—you need sunlight reflecting off spherical raindrops that act as a prism, and at a consistent angle of 40 to 42 degrees. It actually makes a complete circle but the ground typically blocks half of it, so we typically see it in the form of an arch. Why 40 to 42 degrees? I'm glad you asked. Only at that angle of refraction can we see the first and last of our ROY-G-BIV colors. Red light only emerges at a 42-degree angle of sunlight, and violet light at a 40-degree angle. And when that syncs up perfectly, it can be magical, even spiritual, no matter how old you get.

You may not know this, but every rainbow is intensely personal. It is not a fixed object in the sky. The way we see it depends on where we are standing. Something about that, I find meaningful.

As a person of faith, I think about how our spiritual ancestors would have experienced God's provision following the flood in Genesis. First of all, how cool is it, that what directly follows a catastrophic storm is a multicolored arch, splayed across the sky like a shimmering banner?! What a wonderful world, indeed! The ancient world was devastated by a global flood that threatened the very existence of humanity, and God gave a salvific sign, a promise that the future would not be one of destruction but covenant and provision. And the rainbow became central to the story of God's people.

Now, fast-forward with me. It is Pride Sunday, and the beginning of Pride month. It hits us a bit differently when we think of all that a rainbow is promising in our time, especially for the LGBTQIA+ community. For many, the rainbow is a symbol of visibility—that what makes you different and unique (according to societal norms) is not something to be fixed but something to be celebrated, what contributes to this multicolored, fabulous community. For many, a rainbow is still a sign of provision, of agency—that no matter what outside forces threaten one's existence, no one gets to say who you are; that's a God-given sacred right that belongs to each of us. So, this month and every month, we let our rainbows fly.

Thinking on the symbol and science of a rainbow, this morning I want to frame our spiritual heritage, and our present calling, as a people who not only reflect God but also refract God's light in the world.

In the Children's Sermon—which, by the way, is also prepared very much with you adults in mind—we talked about how that beautiful array of colors are already present in light. But it takes a prism to let those colors be seen in the world. No prism, no rainbow.

I find this such a helpful analogy as we think about our calling as image-bearers of the Creator. Things can be prisms, water droplets can be prisms, I want to think about people as prisms. Ours is a prismatic heritage—people of faith positioning their lives such that the light of God can shine through them to colorize the world.

This story of rainbow-making is rooted in the very act of creation in Genesis 1. It says: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." And then was created light by which everything else came into being. God blessed creation and called it good, holy, worth it. Every cell sacred. But that was just the beginning. Everything was blessed in order to be "fruitful and multiply", to then refract the goodness and light of the Creator in ongoing creation.

One commentator put it this way: everything at the beginning was called "good" ("tov"), but not perfect. Everything was setup to be in process. This includes us. We were not created perfect but endowed with everything we would need to overcome, transform, and eventually grow to be a fuller expression of our

creator. The whole system is a system of process and becoming. This challenges the traditional way we think about how God works. God doesn't just create a perfect creation. God calls us to partner in the process of ongoing creation-making.

Creation itself refracts the nature of its Creator and is telling the story of what God is like. Romans 1:20 says: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." From day one, one of the cases that creation has been building is of a non-binary God. Even the apparent dualisms in this creation story—sea and dry land, night and day, animals and plants—can be understood more expansively toward a more vibrant and fabulous story: There are *also* shorelines and marshlands, there's *also* dawn and dusk, fungi and microcellular life.

We celebrate LGBTQIA+ persons, and affirm non-binary and gender-expansive individuals, because they help all of us see the beauty of these expansive in-betweens. Without the queerness of our siblings, there are some things about God and our Imago Dei that we will not see or understand.

I like the poem I saw on social media this week titled "They/Them" by David Gate:

If God created night & day  
& dawn, of course  
& dusk  
& the tangerine rosepink sunset  
& the deep amethyst twilight  
& the infant bright of morning  
  
then to perceive the world in binary  
is to forgo knowledge of the divine.

Creation is a prism, and it has been telling us the story of a God of diversity and endless color. How can we experience the world of rainbows and sunsets and think otherwise?!

From our Lectionary reading in Genesis chapter 12, we also read how Abram was a prism. It was through Abram that God was going to bless all the nations. God's blessing was never meant to stop with Abram. God wanted that flow of

blessing to flow through Abram and his offspring. The purpose of blessing is transmission, not possession. God blesses Abram so that he would in turn be a blessing—A prism of God’s love and light.

In the Gospel reading, Matthew was called to be a prism. If Abram is the respected ancestor of faith, Matthew is quite the opposite: A distrusted tax collector. What blessed ministry could come from someone with such a compromised background?! Where was his Masters degree in theology or Divinity? But Jesus doesn’t wait for Matthew to become the perfect disciple before calling him, he just needed him to be willing. With Matthew, Jesus’s ministry expanded into new circles where he ate with sinners and tax collectors. Matthew would be a conduit of grace and acceptance among some of the most unloved in his community. So, God used a differently-shaped prism to refract a different color into the world, to help expand how we understand God’s embrace.

Jesus was our greatest prism. In Colossians 1:19, it says "For in him [in Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." And in the second chapter of Colossians (2:9), "For in him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." So, Jesus was the bodily, earthbound prism, through which was shown the fullness of God. And Jesus’s life and ministry saturated the earth with the divine color palette. Jesus said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen God." Jesus’s license plate didn’t read "Blessed"—nor was that the hashtag on his social media page—it was, instead, the verb "Blessing". He didn’t hoard all that fullness but lived a prismatic life of divine color and showed us what God is like.

We too are called to be prisms. In fact, our very identity as the Imago Dei, the image of God, calls us to this prismatic life. 1 John 4:12 says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and [God’s] love is made complete in us." When we love, we are building the image of God in living color here on Earth. What monochromatic, grayscale existence would we have otherwise, if not for the color of love in our communities?!

This can be all a bit theoretical, but I’m glad that I’m among a people who love in the concrete. It reminds me of the lame joke of a child psychiatrist who had just paved his driveway with fresh cement. He goes into his house and looks out his window and sees a bunch of kids from the neighborhood putting their handprints and footprints in the wet cement. So, he opens the window and he screams at the kids, in a most vicious way, to get out of his driveway. And his

wife hears him and says: “Honey, you’re a child psychiatrist. How can you yell at children that way?” And he says, “Oh, you don’t understand. I love children in the abstract, not the concrete.”

Love cannot remain in the abstract, in the ideological. We can get to the point of just loving the idea of love and missing that we are to participate in acts of love. This is the difference between knowing you are the image of God, and participating in the act of *imaging* God. One is an identity, the other is living into that identity by what you do. We are called to *image* God—as a verb.

So, when you teach our young people in Sunday School or show up extra early on a Sunday morning to prepare our space for worship, you may feel like you’re just doing a task, but know that you are allowing the light of God to shine through you and color this community of faith.

When you sign-up to help provide food or services of various kinds, you aren’t just completing an assignment, you are helping this community see a fuller picture of who God is.

When you purposefully build community here and take part in the gathering of the visible church, you are bringing a nuance of divine color here that we wouldn’t know otherwise.

You can hear in this a dire implication. As the Imago Dei, spelled D-E-I, when we love and give and serve, we image in the world the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion of God. But the opposite can also be true. We can also become prisms of another kind, sowing the DEI of Division, Exclusion, and Inequity. This is imaging a god of a different sort, but the Creator we read about in Genesis.

As I wrap up here and we get ready to gather at Christ’s table to be served the bread and cup, I want you to think about one actionable thing you will do to position yourself this week to refract God’s love in the world. If we don’t do this with intention, it may not happen otherwise. By this, we not only live into our identity as the Beloved of God, but we allow that blessedness to saturate the Earth with divine color. May it be so, with God’s help. Amen.