

****This was written for our annual Dellabrook/Trinity Picnic. Where both churches meet to mend the racial divisions of our city by worshiping and eating a meal together. Each year the location shifts between the east side, which is prominently African American, and the west side, which is prominently white. The event has taken place every year for 39 years. ****

“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God they were created; male and female God created them...” (Genesis 1: 26-27)

Dearly Beloved Dellabrook and Trinity,

Perhaps you can remember the story from a few years back. It was about an elementary school principal who at the end of each school day, after the bell would sound, would catch every single child as they scurried out the front door pointing at them and saying, “Your life matters.” In church language, we might say that she was reminding every single student that they are created in the image of God.

Beloved, you are created in God’s image. When God imagined a world bursting forth with goodness; after God spoke a liberating word which unfurled the universe. When God wondered who will bear the image of holy love and community, *God created...you.*

Remember though, God says, “Let ‘us’ make humanity in ‘our’ image.” God’s image is communal, which means our image is communal as well. And let's be real: It’s the “us” part that is the complicated piece. We have natural compulsions to hide and divide. We often live according to our own self-interest rather than to the interest of another. Our systems fracture us. Our political allegiances consume us. Even our theologies can become fodder for injustice. The communal image of God is ruined by tribal loyalties and caste systems and oppressive powers which force our friends and family members into dances of compliancy. We, as a human race, have made the diverse, communal image of God too small. As Blaise Pascal once wrote: “God made humanity in God’s image and then *humanity returned the compliment.*”

But please hear this well, beloved: this all expansive, communal image of God that is bestowed onto us requires that we must reaffirm those who have received “less-than-image-of-God” status. It is why we stand with the Muslim, immigrant, refugee and our women. Why we speak out against legislation that threatens LGBTQ rights. And why we proclaim “Black Lives Matter.”

This is also why when someone says, “All Lives Matter” as an alternate to affirming Black lives, it narrows our perspective and makes it *less inclusive rather than more.* Because it fails to confess that we live in a society which does not affirm the existence of Black bodies as valued and equal citizens in our community. The statement affirming “all lives” suggests that our system functions equally for everyone when it clearly does not.

I mean think about it: if one of our children comes home from school after having a peachy-keen day, while the other comes through the door rattled in angst because of something that happened, which child will we need to reaffirm more—with both our words and actions—that they matter? If our hurt

child asks us with tear-filled eyes, “Do you love me?” How might they feel if we responded, “Well honey, I love everyone!”

I think it’s why Jesus said he came for the sick and vulnerable and not for the healthy ones who are already provided for (Matt. 9:12).

It’s why he says we will recognize him not as some random Joe we pass at the supermarket (or in our churches!), but as one who is hungry, thirsty, naked, in the hospital or in prison (Matt. 25:35).

It’s why the very first words of Jesus' first sermon **do not** begin with an all-inclusive, “Blessed are all lives!” But rather he suggests, “Blessed are the poor, the meek, the mourning, the mercy givers and peacemakers” (Matt. 5: 1-11).

Jesus reaffirms those who have received “less-than-image-of-God” status, and he encourages those who are willing to risk of themselves to serve and protect God's image in others. Jesus reminds us that the God we worship is far bigger than the social constructs our systems create—including whiteness—which can conveniently cast away or hold People of Color down; not only economically, but socially, psychologically and spiritually as well.

So, dearly beloved, here we are: Dellabrook and Trinity. Two churches who are brought together by a thirty-nine-year tradition which has been handed down through the decades to us. Where a sacred space is held each year so we can meet under a picnic shelter to pray for each other, to share our stories and experiences, and to eat way too much food!

I hope you know that I have always sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit when I am with you. Perhaps it is because we’ve been graced with a conviction—which goes back all the way to the beginning of creation—that we reflect God’s image more together than we do apart. That we really are woven in the single garment of destiny; bound together as holy people, who are made in the image of the Holy Community.

With all God's grace, peace, love and glory,
Jon