“One Bread, One Body” - Stephanie Sorge, 6.2.24

It all began with a sneeze. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Aristophanes decries the body’s “appalling union of nose and irritation,” and then launches into the “real nature” of humanity. He explains that the first human was neither male nor female, but intersex. They represented Sun, Earth, and Moon, had one large, round body, and 8 limbs. If they really wanted to get moving, all 8 limbs could stick out straight, and the human could proceed with cartwheels in any direction. These first humans were strong, and energetic, and tried to ascend to the gods, so Zeus decided to weaken them without destroying them, by cutting them in half, creating male and female. I haven’t been able to get out of my head the image of round human wheels rolling all over the place since re-visiting Plato last week.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Interestingly, there are multiple midrashim in the Talmud that echo a similar idea - that Adam - the first human created by God - was a nonbinary, intersex person. That first human was then split in two - a male and a female. Two midrashim cite Psalm 139 extensively to explain this first human, a complete, intersex being. Another references a verse we just heard from Genesis: male and female God created them, in the image of God. Being created in the image of God would entail would complexity and internal diversity, and it would defy our regular binaries and boxes. Any way you slice it, that first spark of humanity’s creation, God deemed “supremely good.”

The creation accounts were never intended to be scientific, nor exhaustive. God created day and night, water and land, sky and earth. None of those binaries reflects the diversity that we experience daily, a truth recently highlighted by Ken Burns in his now-viral commencement address at Brandeis University.[[2]](#footnote-2) The world around us gives us glimpses and glimmers of the incomprehensible creativity of God. When humanity is made in God’s image, how could it be anything but the most expansive and diverse representation we could imagine? Even that barely scratches the surface.

Each and every one of us bears God’s image, but none of us reflects it completely. There are so many ways in which we are different from one another, but we have the tendency to weaponize those differences, to declare what is acceptable and not acceptable, what is preferred and superior, and what is inferior. However we try to divide and rank humanity, God created us, and deemed humanity “supremely good.” Not parts of it, but the whole.

In Plato’s dialogue, the reason for splitting humans in two was that the original nonbinary humans were too powerful. They posed a threat to the gods. The midrashim seem not so concerned about why the androgynous human was split. The split is just reflective of our human experience, in which people are not round beings arrayed back to back. Androgynous Adam is the necessary prototype because no single human, no single gender, could represent the image of God.

The gods of Greek mythology wanted to put humans in their place, distant from them. The Creator we worship seeks to draw us closer, to God and to each other. If the first couple of chapters of Genesis envision the ideal, it also provides a pattern for re-creation, redemption, and restorative hope. As far as humans are concerned, that includes all the diverse ways in which we reflect God’s image, and joyful relationship with God, who has created us and delights in our creation.

I remember learning the basics of genetic expression in school. Brown eyes and blue eyes I could understand, but I still have no idea where my green eyes fit on the dominant and recessive charts. I also learned that XX chromosomes are female, and XY male. Many argue that there are only two created sexes - male and female. But it’s not that simple. In fact, there are over 70 known variations and combinations of those Xs and Ys. The deeper we dig trying to define exactly what makes a person either male or female, the harder it is to define, because it’s not binary. It’s just not! That’s not even getting into gender identity, gender expression, and attraction orientation.

This isn’t new, either. The Talmud recognized at least 8 distinct genders. Though many Jewish laws were gender-specific, Rabbis understood that not everyone fit into the binary categories of male and female, so the Talmud reflects a diversity of genders beyond that binary.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Throughout Scripture we get glimpses of gender and orientation diversity, but the impulse of the Greek gods seems to be a closer representation of our own inclinations: to sort and categorize and divide people to consolidate power and exert control. Jesus’s own life and relationships pushed the boundaries and binaries. Paul, who was hardly a feminist, proclaims that all the differences by which we divide ourselves have been made null in Jesus Christ. There is no need for the binaries and distinctions that were created and upheld by human institutions, because we are all children of God. Full stop.

Jesus modeled God’s expansive love, and gave his life for it. One of his last acts on earth was to bring his friends together to share a common meal. Even the one who had already betrayed him was invited, and seated at the table, and fed by Jesus himself. It’s a meal we continue to share, remembering that night, and remembering Christ’s continual invitation for all people to come, to gather around the table, and to find unity in our diversity, and wholeness despite our brokenness. The faces we see around this table may look familiar, and often very similar, but if we squint just so, maybe we can start to get a clearer picture: Christ at the head of the table, and the full diversity of humanity gathered around it.

I was recently remembering and reflecting on the first time I went to a Pride event. It was a big one, at Asbury Park in New Jersey. Bruce Springsteen was a headliner, and I got to shake hands with then-Governor Jim McGreevey. I did the math. Let’s just say that Lizzy if Lizzy and I had both been there, she would have been one of the babies in a stroller or carrier. She wouldn’t have been the only one. I was there working with the Human Rights Campaign, and one of my colleagues said, “You may be expecting glitter and feathers and rainbows, and there will be lots of that. But you’ll also see the greatest cross-section of people you could ever imagine. That’s Pride.”

The kingdom of heaven is like… It’s a gathering more diverse than one can fully imagine. It’s a place where people can come and be their full, divinely-created selves, and where the diversity of God’s creation can be celebrated, as supremely good and absolutely fabulous. It’s a gathering that celebrates and promotes justice, peace, and reconciliation. It’s a come-as-you-are invitation, a giant table where all are welcome. Where I am welcome. Where you are welcome. Most of all, it’s about love, and it’s beautiful. May we be inspired by the Holy Spirit to live into that vision of justice, reconciliation, and re-creation, following Jesus as we share God’s expansive and extravagant love with all. Amen.

1. Plato’s *Symposium*, lines 189 and following [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9n1OqPzIKH4#bottom-sheet [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-eight-genders-in-the-talmud/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)