

Creating something and having it become a masterpiece requires incredible care and attention. I think it even requires a certain level of fear and marvel with each step of creation. Like a sculptor etching in stone or an artist painting a portrait. The fear a creator has is not paralysis as we might often associate with fear, but instead the utmost care and respect for the creation giving the finest level of attention and focus to every dot and iota.

The psalmist in Psalm 139 declared:

"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

"Wonderful are your works, God, that I know very well."

In this Psalm there is no mistake that God is the creator- like a weaver making a hand-woven rug, one strand and one up and under at a time, or like a potter sitting at the wheel working their hands to shift and shape, adding a little water here and there, spinning the wheel a little faster or slower - and he, a representation we understand theologically as humanity or each of us, is the creation.

Do you know that YOU are fearfully and wonderfully made? YOU are!!!

Have you experienced the wonderful work of God? YOU have because YOU are a wonderful work of God!!!

We, YOU and I, are God's masterpiece. God has put God's personal touch on us to make us who we are, including all of our imperfect perfections. The difference between us and a basket or a vase, is that God doesn't tend to us once and then place us on a shelf. God creates the intricate details in the beginning and continues to create in us as we develop and become throughout our life who God intends for us to be. In this, we are God's living masterpieces.

For anyone who may have any shadow of doubt toward this, let me ask two questions:

Do you believe God is capable of making a mistake in God's creation?

And with that, do you believe God is capable of making, creating a human, God's most precious and beloved creation, anyone less than a masterpiece?

*Your answers to these questions give insight into who you believe God to be and what God is capable of doing. We can dive deeper into this another time.*

In light of our impossible possibility focus for today, I am going to ask a slightly different question for us to tend to. Are YOU a saint? Think about it. Don't punt it down the field or be afraid of pride clouding your judgement. And before you go shaking your head and selling yourself short like most people when asked that question, let's discuss for a moment about what it means to be a saint. As we do, I pray you will see what God sees, what I can see, and what others can likely see, in you.

A common definition of a saint is "a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and typically regarded as being in heaven after death: a very virtuous, kind, or patient person." There is a good chance that lines up with what we all would define as a saint. Biblically, the term saint is translated "holy one" or a person who has been set apart by God for his/her own specific duties or purpose. In both of these definitions, a saint is someone who lives in accordance with God, God's law, God's will, and God's way.

It is fair to say then that a saint is someone who reflects Christ and Christ's love and light in the world. This is what Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. That we are to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

Throughout history, what has determined whether someone is given the honorable title of saint? In short, I believe it can be summed up as someone who has, throughout their life, reflected the virtues and characteristics of Christ: love of neighbor, compassion, servant leadership, sacrifice, faithful discipleship, humility, patience, to get the list going. In their embodying of these things, others have been witnesses to God's holiness shown through them and in honor of their commitment and faithfulness have celebrated them as saints.

I am all in and drinking the Kool-Aid of shining Christ's love and light to the world. I too honor and celebrate God's holiness embodied and witnessed when that happens. But, and I mean this respectfully to the thousands of years of religious traditions that assign the title of saint to certain individuals, I want to push back on two small caveats. One, I don't believe sainthood is only earned throughout life and two, I don't believe sainthood is given to humans by humans: a title adorned by humans after a life has been determined well-lived from another human perspective.

Sainthood is a gift from God instilled in us, God's masterpieces. Sainthood is an honor and responsibility given by no one other than God and it is a privilege and gift etched into us from the beginning of our creation. Sainthood is a result of "who" God has created us to be and our willingness to partner with God throughout the life God gives us. Our life then, as a gift from

God, is our opportunity to live into our call and purpose to fulfill God's handiwork by embodying the sainthood God instills in us.

Impossible? Unable? Can't? No. With God, sainthood is possible, we are able, and we can. Are we perfect? No. Are we expected to be? No. We tend to see ourselves for our shortcomings and faults and weaknesses. We tend to look at ourselves through the lens of our neighbors and comparisons to others. We tend to measure ourselves and where we are in life by looking outward and to the right and to the left. We summarize who we are based on what we believe others think of us, expect of us, or how we believe we can please them.

It is time we see ourselves as God sees us. It is time we believe we are everything God has created us to be. It is time we embody the wonderful works of God that are us. Just think how that would shift our perspectives, passions, and possibilities, and not only individually, but communally, and globally.

God doesn't see us and look at us the same way we have come to see ourselves and look at ourselves. God looks in and works to encourage us to look up rather than right and left. Because of God and God's work as the master creator, fearfully tending to every dot and iota, every strand of hair on our head, freckle on our nose, muscle, or heart string, it is possible for us to be saints, reflecting Christ's love and light.

What does this mean for us? E. V. F.- I want to encourage us all to remember this acronym when we look at ourselves in the mirror or begin to think, "I can't. I am unable. That is impossible." We can even use E. V. F. when thinking about others, as they too are a masterpiece of God. Sometimes the actions of others make us question or forget others are God's masterpiece, but indeed they too are "fearfully and wonderfully made" at the core. Perhaps they have gotten lost along the way or distracted or overwhelmed by something, it can happen to any of us, but it is possible for them to be saints too.

E. = Enough

YOU are enough! Because God made YOU who YOU are, YOU are enough! Just the way YOU are, YOU are enough to God! Some are this and that, with this and that, able to do this and that. YOU are included! YOU are something, with something, able to do something, and together with one another, we make up God's tapestry of humanity. Don't underestimate the YOU God has made YOU to be!!! YOU are enough!

V.= Valuable

In being enough, YOU are valuable! YOU are worth a whole lot to God as God took time to craft and create and intimately come to know the YOU YOU are and the YOU God is

helping YOU to become. Don't underestimate the value YOU are to God and to the whole of God's plan and will for humanity!

#### F.= Fruitful

The value YOU are to God is expressed through the fruit you bear by the work of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling and flowing within YOU. Of course, we are not talking about apples and oranges. The fruitfulness of God's Spirit being poured out through us to others can be summed up beautifully as the apostle Paul references in Galatians 5:22-23: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." Each of these are seeds sown in us at creation. There is good that is born in us all by God and that good is intended to be shared with others. As seeds, we must participate with God in helping to foster and nurture those seeds so they can become the prominent fruit in our lives.

At the close of Paul's list of fruits of the spirit, he declares "against these things there is no law." Against love there is no law. Against goodness there is no law. Against faithfulness there is no law.

We, you and I, are free to be enough, be valued, and be fruitful. We, you and I, are free to be God's masterpieces, saints of God's own choosing, God's own redeeming, and God's own saving. Glory be to God... let all God's people say... Amen.