

# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE AGE OF AI”

Scripture Lesson: John 1: 1-14

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, June 22, 2025  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### John 1: 1-14

#### The Word Became Flesh

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

6 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

10 *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

14 *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

#### The Image of God in the Age of AI

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

I know it is difficult for some people to imagine a world without a smartphone. I remember the day my dad walked through the door holding his first “portable phone.” And I use that term loosely—this thing was the size of a shoebox and came with a shoulder strap!

Fast forward to today: our daughter Mary Caroline has a phone that fits in her pocket and has as much computing ability as some desktop computers. We’re living in a time when technological advancements are happening at an unprecedented rate, and artificial intelligence—or AI, as it is called—is reshaping the way we live, work, and relate to one another. AI impacts everything from cell phones to robots.

Now, I personally marvel at how Artificial Intelligence has the capacity to solve problems, and how it may eventually identify a cure for some of the world's deadliest diseases. At least, I hope it will. AI can mimic patterns of human engagement, and it can even learn. It can write emails and analyze data. It can even write sermons—though not this one.

AI can enhance our efficiency. It can encourage us by making us feel seen or heard. It can do a variety of good and positive things. But it can also automate and replace. It can be used to generate false information.

If you haven't seen a "deepfake" before, it is a video created to look like someone when, in fact, it is a digital creation—it isn't really them. These additions to the contemporary landscape of misinformation can make it difficult to distinguish the real from the phony. They can loosen our grip on reality.

All of this and more are considerations when talking about AI. But perhaps the most important thing to remember about it is revealed in its name—for it is, after all, "artificial." That is to say, Artificial Intelligence doesn't breathe. It doesn't feel. It cannot look into the window of our soul and forgive, and neither can it redeem—at least not in any theological sense.

What's more, there is much that remains unknown about AI, which has led to the need for oversight. Even the budget reconciliation bill currently before the Senate speaks to this, though it does not say nearly enough for some.

Pope Leo XIV recently addressed what he called our "urgent need for serious reflection and ongoing discussion on the inherently ethical dimensions of AI, as well as its responsible governance."

I suppose one of the chief problems with Artificial Intelligence is that AI is made by us and created in our image. AI is crafted by human minds and is often modeled after human behaviors. If that sounds familiar—though just a little bit off—it should.

Julie read for us this morning from Genesis chapter 1, and in those few verses we were told, among other things, that we are created in the image of God. The image of God—which theologians often refer to by the Latin phrase *Imago Dei*—has long stood at the center of Christian teaching about what it means to be human.

*Imago* means "image," and *Dei* means "of God." So when we say that human beings are made in the image of God, we are affirming something essential about us—something that sets us apart from everything else that God made at the time of creation.

Unto us was given rationality, moral awareness, and relational capacity. Unto us was given the divine mandate to fill the earth and subdue it—not as tyrants, mind you, but as stewards.

Sadly, the image of God in us is but a glimmer of God's grandeur. Like a virus that infects a computer system, sin has corrupted us and has left our image more than a little bit tarnished.

But praise be to God, there's hope—because the Bible teaches us that God's image in us can be restored! But not by anything that we can do. No! Only Jesus could pay the wages of sin, which is death. Only Jesus could atone for our sins.

And seeing as he did so as the ultimate revelation of God's love, I think it is safe to say that Jesus is our best template for what the image of God looks like!

What we see is what John describes in our New Testament lesson as the "Word made flesh"—a person named Jesus who was human like all of us but God like none of us.

Jesus showed us that we can know and be known by God. He showed us how to be in relationship with others and how to be of strong moral character. Jesus lived his life with purpose and was entrusted with real authority—authority to express the will and intention of God and to care for the world and its people, to love us so much that while we were yet sinners, He died for us!

That is the image of God. Yet oh how often do we conform ourselves to an image of the world's making? I dare say, if we are not careful, we can begin to live our lives with other people's images, and opinions, and preferences in mind.

And this is where the conversation about Artificial Intelligence is more than merely a footnote. When we outsource who we are and our decisions—when we filter our relationships through algorithms—we slowly but surely surrender our humanity, one simple convenience at a time.

Now, if you don't know about such AI tools, like ChatGPT or Grammarly or all the rest, that may not be a bad thing. But if you do dwell in that space, then you know that, each in their own way, those increasingly smart platforms tempt us in ways that are pleasing to the ear. They tell us, "Great job! Well said!" or "Here's a better way to say it."

But tell me, if that was all we heard—praise and adoration, "Oh, you are so smart!"—they might create in us the illusion that we're brilliant, always eloquent, always right. But what if what we said was less than intelligent? Would we even know?

I'm convinced that there are any number of people out there in the world today who live in their own AI echo chamber. It feeds them. The algorithms place them in groups of like-minded people. But AI doesn't test them, doesn't challenge them, doesn't hold them accountable like God does. What ends up happening is that we begin to believe that those digital versions of ourselves are our true selves.

But the image of God is not artificial. It is authentic, eternal, and ethical. It builds us up. It tells us that we matter because we are made for God's glory—to reflect His image! But it also holds us accountable. It calls us to truth, to goodness, to love!

This morning, we commissioned a group of students and adults to go out from this community, not because it will make for a good reel, but because, in Christ's name, it will make a difference!

It is the love of Christ that compels us to go and do such things. And, in a similar manner, it is also the love of Christ that compels us to come to this table.

Jesus was not a theory. He wasn't a download. His life was based on real relationships, real accountability, real formation.

To be certain, there was nothing artificial about our Savior! He didn't pretend to be someone he wasn't. He didn't outsource his faith to the synagogue. He bore his image—lived it faithfully—each and every day of his life!

Indeed, throughout his life, Jesus was a living witness to the very character of God. And this One, who touched the leper, and embraced the child, and comforted the sinner—he also took the bread and the cup, and he said to his disciples, “This is my body, given for you... and this is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood” for you!

Oh, in an age so increasingly influenced by a life that can be lived virtually, Jesus showed up in the flesh. He didn’t swipe past the hard stuff. He didn’t simply provide a placeholder for what mattered. He lived and died for what mattered!

He lived and died for you and for me, so that we might live for him—that we would be the very exhibition of the kingdom of heaven for the world—that we would be Jesus’ hands and feet!

This table is where God meets us. This is where he empowers us! And from this table, he sends us—all of us! We are sent with a clear directive, a divine imperative, a crystal-clear image of who we are and whose we are.

We are the children of God! So, let us look like it—but, more importantly, let us live like it! In the name... Amen.