

“God’s Imprint on Us”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
World Communion Sunday – October 7, 2018

**Hebrews 1: 1-14**  
**Psalm 8**

*“(Jesus) is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (1:3).*

One of the things I love about being at the beach is walking in the sand. I enjoy going down to the water’s edge, standing in the wet sand, and letting the waves lap over my feet and legs. It’s a soothing experience which makes me feel connected to the earth and creation in a way that is unlike anything else.

Just like a child, I will often look down at my feet and see how they form an imprint in the sand. Unlike the hard surfaces of concrete or asphalt, sand provides a cushion and gives way with your body weight pressing down on it. If you’re in the wet sand by the water, you’ll sink much lower and your imprint will be deeper. If you’re in the drier sand further away from the water, you’ll not sink as low, but you’ll still make an imprint with your feet. Gravity, weight, how our bodies are formed – all of these are factors which make an imprint while walking and standing in the sand on the beach.

Another image that came to my mind when reading this passage was sticking your hand in mud or concrete to make a permanent cast. When the girls were little, we had them do this for both sets of grandparents. Each of them placed their hands in a form of wet concrete, pressing down so that their imprints would be cast once they removed them. To look at those imprints now reminds us of a moment in life that was special and precious, a moment that is forever cast in stone.

The word “imprint” implies that something was formed due to an impression being made on something else. That force or pressure was applied to create an imprint. That someone took action to create an image or impression on something or someone.

The writer of Hebrews begins his book by stating that “God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (1:1-2). While God had spoken to God’s people in different ways and through different means in Israel’s life, now God has taken a direct action that is unique and new from those previous actions. God has spoken through God’s own Son – Jesus Christ. God has made a decision to press the weight of his love into humanity and speak to the world in human form.

God’s Son “has been appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (1:2). This imprint of God’s very being in human

form was present from the beginning of time, from the moment this world was created. Jesus' grace and love were present when the psalmist offered awe and wonder to God's creative beauty and power. "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth? You have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:1, 3-4).

Indeed, God's imprint on human life through Jesus Christ is precisely how God is mindful of us human beings. God chose to not only speak through prophets, but also to speak in the very human form which God created. And because God chose to act in this free, grace-filled way, humanity is reminded that we are blessed by that love in ways that tie us to this created world we live in. We have been "crowned with glory and honor, and been given dominion over the works of God's hands" (Psalm 8:5-6). We have been entrusted with the care of God's creatures - sheep and oxen, beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fish of the sea (8:7-8). It is our responsibility to be good stewards of this good creation which God has made for us to live and breathe and serve as God's beloved children.

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If God has chosen to imprint God's being in God's own Son, then we are fellow sisters and brothers with Jesus, are we not? Indeed, later in Hebrews, the writer states: "For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11). Rachel Keefe writes: *Jesus is not ashamed to call us siblings. Though I am grateful beyond what words can express, I sometimes find this hard to believe. Hebrews tells us that we are sanctified by the same God and claimed as siblings by Jesus. Human behavior, including my own, often makes me wonder how Jesus can possibly claim us all as siblings.*

*I don't need to list all the ways in which we don't behave much like we are related to God, or how often we fail to live out what Jesus taught. Yet that hasn't and won't change the claim Jesus makes on us. We are siblings of the risen Christ; we are siblings of one another. The beauty of this is that our behavior doesn't change this. I suspect that the writer of Hebrews was trying to get folks to remember this. We are set apart for holy purposes by God and claimed as siblings by Christ. These facts have done little to change human behavior over the years.*

*We have faulty memories. We are to treat each other with compassion, love, mercy, and kindness because we belong to God. The world is not ours to do with as we wish, but to tend on God's behalf. God created all that is. God's majesty is in all and through all. Just*

*because we fail to be mindful of God does not mean that God is not mindful of us (Psalm 8). I don't think there is better news than this.*

*How many ways do we need to be told that God's love for us never ends? In the creation story God notices that one human alone is loneliness incarnate. God creates more so that no one will be alone. Not only will we not be alone, we will have the joy of tending God's creation and loving one another. The prophets will remind us when we forget how much God loves us.*

*Then Jesus renews and reshapes God's claim on us. It is not enough for us to love God or ourselves or neighbors or creation. We must love as God loves. We must love our neighbors and ourselves with a never-ending love.*

*Our failure to see who and whose we are does not change how God sees us. God remains mindful of the particularity that is each human being, even when we forget that we are created in love for love. God's love for us does not end when we forget that we are made in God's image or that our neighbors are as well. Jesus claims us as siblings so that we will claim all our neighbors as God's beloved children. We haven't learned how to love one another just yet, but that doesn't mean we aren't set aside for this sacred purpose. Nor does it mean that Jesus was wrong about who we are (<https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/sundays-coming/jesus-siblings-hebrews-11-4-25-12-genesis-218-24-psalm-8-mark-102-16>).*

Now more than ever, we need to hear this good news of the gospel. As we are torn further apart into ideological camps in our culture, we must remember that God's love has been imprinted on our hearts in Christ. As we witness people struggle with addiction and loneliness and mental illness and grief, we must act as ones who have been changed by God's imprint, loving others as God has loved us in Christ. As we experience violence – in action, in word, in life – we must hear once again that the word of God is present now, forging in us a desire to bring peace and wholeness and strength for all of God's children.

There are at least two concrete ways we can live out and remember God's imprint on us. One is to not live in fear, to learn from those who are not like us, and to sow peace where otherwise distrust and hatred might grow. On this World Communion Sunday, we are reminded that God has imprinted his love on all peoples of the world, and the breadth and depth of God's majesty is to be celebrated and embraced. We are seeking at John Knox to live into this reality of God's imprint on us – in our partnerships with Iglesia Nueva Creacion, with multiple groups in our community, and now with a new partnership with the church in the Dominican Republic.

The second is to come to this table and remember. To remember that in the bread and the cup, we are given the earthly reminders of God's imprint in God's Son. To give thanks that we are invited to the table - no matter who we are, where we come from, what language we speak, or how sinful we feel. We are all invited to this table - to taste, to embrace, to be sent - as disciples and agents of peace to all corners of the world. For just as Jesus Christ is God's imprint on humanity, so too are the sacraments God's imprint on us that we are always and forever claimed as God's beloved children.

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Thanks be to God. Amen.