

“God’s Imprint on Us”
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
World Communion Sunday – October 7, 2012

Hebrews 1: 1-4; 2: 1-10

Where do we search for God? How do we search for God? Why do we search for God?

These are some of the most basic questions of faith. As humans, we naturally search for meaning to the life we lead. We seek that meaning in relationships, in the natural world, in the material world, in the realm of philosophy and religion. When times are good, we seem to find God without any problem, feeling as if he is there in our success. When times are challenging, we tend to lose sight of God, wondering how God could allow us to feel such pain. The Christian journey is one which is always seeking maturity and balance within these peaks and valleys of feeling connected to God.

The writer of Hebrews speaks to these key questions of faith, and affirms the central essence of God’s being: “In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He 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” (1:2-3). God made a choice to come and meet us in human form in Jesus Christ, and God’s exact imprint is present in Jesus’ being. Where do we search for God? In God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, who “sustains all things by his powerful word.”

Susan Andrews writes: *As the “exact imprint of God’s very being” (1:3), the Jesus in the book of Hebrews shows me the path toward polishing and reflecting the image of God in my own soul. Educator Rodger Nishioka has helped the contemporary church understand what our dropout young adults are yearning and searching for. A palpable, passionate Jesus is at the heart of their hunger. Hebrews unveils this passionate Jesus – one who is made perfect through the excruciating sufferings of our human experience. And so Jesus embodies a paradox – the authenticity of human life and the authenticity of divine life wrapped up in incarnational reality. Jesus is the real thing – the authentic pioneer of God-drenched living, reflecting the glory of God in the flesh-and-blood experiences of earthly life.*

To the Jews, “Christ crucified” was a scandal, because for them, the mysterious God, who has no name, could never be visible to human eyes. And to the Greeks, “Christ crucified” was foolishness, because for them, a God who feels, suffers, weeps, and dies was anathema to the Hellenistic mind. But “Christ crucified” was, for the write of Hebrews, the tough and tender grace of a God who loves us unconditionally.

I am more and more convinced that the uniqueness of the Christian life is the radical way we are called to embrace paradox – grace and truth, life and death, darkness and light, duty and delight. Jesus is the one who shows us how. In the rich verses of Hebrews we are given a Jesus who embodies glory and humiliation, power

and suffering, authority and servanthood, radical grace and radical obedience. Each side of the paradox makes the other side possible. In stunning symmetry, we find in Hebrews an utterly majestic and cosmic God coming to touch us – up close and personal (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, © 2009: 134-136*).

The gift of faith has been imprinted upon each of our hearts through the life, death, and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The gift of faith connects us to God and to one another, bridging the divides of language, culture, economy and politics. The gift of faith forges in us a desire to share this gift with others, and not hold onto it for ourselves. The gift of faith is God's imprint on us.

Today is World Communion Sunday, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper with Christians all over God's creation. There are times when it can seem distant to relate to celebrations like today, for we don't see people from Africa and South America and Asia and Europe in their homelands. It might be easy to brush aside the significance of today as "too hard to understand or believe."

If that is where you are today, I would challenge you to open your hearts and consider how God's imprint on you is mirrored in this community in which we live. We don't have to go out and visit the world anymore; the world is here and waiting for us to interact with it. What a blessing it is to have within this congregation men and women whose Christian witness has come from places like Brazil, Pakistan, Africa, and Mexico. What a blessing it is to open our doors to neighbors from Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere for legal assistance, tutoring for school children, support for alcohol addiction, and many other needs.

And on this day when we celebrate the Lord's Supper with Christians all over the world, we also are reminded of our calling as peacemakers among God's children. When we receive the Peacemaking Offering today, will we consider how those monies might build a community center for troubled youth, or empower people to build a water treatment facility for potable water, or engage in dialogue among warring peoples so that violence might end? If there ever was a time when we need to hear the call to peacemaking, it is today. How will we embody the gift of faith imprinted on our hearts, so that justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?

We are not called to judge and alienate those who are different than us; we are called to honor what makes us unique, and to build bridges through conversation and learning – to live fully the faith imprinted on our hearts. I believe we are moved to see the world as God sees the world: not as countries with borders, and people insulated from one another; instead, this entire globe is God's, and all of its inhabitants are deserving of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

On this day when we celebrate the Lord's Supper with Christians all over the globe, and on this day when we renew our calling to be peacemakers, may we recognize once again how God's imprint in Jesus Christ claims us each and every day.

"It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the pioneer of (our) salvation perfect through (his) sufferings" (2:10).

Thanks be to God! Amen.