

The Imprint of God

Preached FCCW 10-7-2018

World Communion Sunday

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2: 5-12

Today is World Communion Sunday; an ecumenical celebration of the Lord's Supper that began in the Presbyterian church in 1936. Since then it has come to be observed in many other denominations, including the UCC.

On World Communion Sunday Christians pay special attention to the celebration of Holy Communion as a way to mark our global oneness in Christ. And yet, the reality is that the Church is much more fragmented than it is unified.

After all, each Christian denomination started out with its own conviction that the Church up to that point in time hadn't quite gotten things right and that they had a better idea for following Jesus that they wanted to put into practice.

That is not necessarily a bad thing. It is evidence of people thinking seriously and deeply about what it is they believe, and striving to move closer to being a church that manifests those beliefs in what they do and is faithful to the Lord they follow.

So, on World Communion Sunday, what we celebrate is the strength born of the diversity expressed among Christ's people in the world. Even as we lament the divisions that separate us, we can celebrate the continual desire we all have for trying to get it right; even though none of us ever actually get it perfect.

What makes the church the church is not that it is filled with perfect people, but that it is made up of people who admit their imperfections so that they can be transformed through Christ's perfect sacrifice on their behalf.

The opening lines of Hebrews describe the way that Jesus came from the glory of God's presence in order to reveal God's true nature and to make purification on the cross for the sin that separated humankind from God, then returned to the glory of heaven.

It's as if Jesus came to set the world right, then handed it over to his followers to take care of things from there on. Jesus entrusted us to continue the work that he began! To become messengers of God's love as he had been. As messengers of God's love, we humans are prone to get in the way of the message we are to deliver; and as servants we are too often guilty of putting self-interest before serving others.

The writer of Hebrews says that although all things in this world were placed under our supervision, we see much evidence that we are not fulfilling God's intentions for us very well.

G.K. Chesterton once observed that, "whatever else is or is not true, one thing is certain; human beings are not what we were meant to be." And, as a result of human beings not being what we are meant to be, the Church has yet to live up to being what it was meant to be. But despite our deficiencies, God doesn't give up on us. In fact, the author of Hebrews claims that God crowns us with glory and honor.

These are words that should fill the church with hope. A hope not based on what we may do to improve ourselves to be worthy of glory and honor, but in what Jesus has done for us.

Clearly Jesus, as the exact imprint of God's being and the reflection of God's glory, is the ultimate messenger through whom God speaks to the world. And as the one who suffered and died to purify the world from sin, he is the highest example of service to humanity.

It's not surprising then, that we read in verse four that Jesus is "superior to angels" and is crowned with glory and honor. What should be surprising, is to be reminded that even Jesus allowed himself to be for a little while lower, than angels as we are. He did this by sharing in our humanity.

He also shows us how the rough edges of our humanity can be smoothed and polished, so that we better reflect the glory of God and so that God's imprint is seen more clearly in us.

The Bible gives us a word for that process. Sanctification. Sanctification means growing into the people God made us to be and enables us to become. We participate in our Sanctification as we apply ourselves to making spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship and service part of our lives, so that the imprint of God's being and the reflection of God's glory shines through us, and through the Church.

Sanctification is a work in progress. It doesn't happen all at once. Because you and I are works in progress, the Church is always a work in progress, too.

On World Communion Sunday, despite the differences that distinguish one denomination from another, and seem to divide us, we belong to a family of brothers and sisters sharing one love that spans the globe and the centuries.

For Jesus, the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them, that is, us, you and me, brothers and sisters. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we may not look alike, dress alike or have the same talents, or even agree on everything about what it means to belong to this family.

The unity we celebrate on World Communion Sunday is not any solidarity of our own making; it is not based on what we claim about ourselves, but what Jesus says about us, and that is, which is that we are all his brothers and sisters, spiritual sons and daughters of the same Father.

We may not see the Church being what it was meant to be all the time, but we do see Jesus, who made himself less than angels for a while, so that we could aspire to being greater than angels through him, for eternity.

In other words, we can be discouraged by the ways that the imprint of God is not always distinct in us, or we can fix our gaze on Jesus, who can make us into what we would never, in a million years, become on our own.

The bread we eat and the cup we share may look and taste different from place to place. But, in sharing this holy meal and honoring what it means, we demonstrate that despite our precious and sometimes painful differences, we are all one in one Lord, whose grace we celebrate in bread and the fruit of the vine.

As we gather around the Table to eat the Bread of oneness in which we find unity, and drink the Cup of forgiveness for what still divides us, may we all know the joy of being sisters and brothers in the great family of God. And may the imprint of God and the reflection of God's glory be visible in us, as well as it was in our brother Jesus.

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