

FINGERPRINTS AND LOVEMARKS

Fingerprints are nothing new. The delicate swirls, ridges, and patterns that lie at the tips of our fingers have long been recognized as a form of personal identification. The ancients might not have realized the extreme uniqueness of every person's fingerprints. But as far back as the reign of the Babylonian King Hammurabi in 1792 BC, convicts were fingerprinted. In China as early as 246 BC, fingerprints were used to "sign" legal contracts. In 1788 a German anatomist, Johann Andreas Mayer, proved and published that fingerprints are unique to each individual. The idea caught on so fast that by the mid-nineteenth century, data banks of fingerprints were being collected all over the world for identification purposes.

Science has revealed other ways we are unique and singular. Our DNA is our own. Each cell of our body is genetically coded just for us. High tech gadgetry has made it possible for us to now open sealed doors just by looking at them. So, if you happen to have an x-ray of your skull lying around, check out the shape of your nasal sinuses. Those too are unrepeated in any other person.

God made us different from one another in so many wholly and totally different ways. Yet as Jesus offers up to the Father his own personal "Lord's Prayer," he closes by praying for "Oneness" among all those who follow him as his disciples. Does this mean that Jesus prays for us all to be the same? To be a body of "beige believers"? Is this a call for "Cloned Christians"? A monotone mission? Is every follower of Jesus expected to keep the same pace, have the same stride, and move to the same rhythm?

When Jesus prayed for oneness he was not just looking around the Passover table at twelve individuals. Yes, Jesus was praying for those who had followed him for the past three years. But he was also praying for the next generation and the next. Jesus was also praying for those who would come to faith because of the words and witness of those first twelve. And Jesus was praying for the generation after that one... and for the generation after that one... and for all future generations... until the end of time.

When the risen Christ appeared to Saul and started him on his journey to the gentiles, Jesus wasn't thinking inside the box. Gentiles, Samaritans, women of "Questionable morals," tax collectors, Roman soldiers- these were the focus of Jesus' earthly ministry and the mission field for each new post-resurrection, Pentecost generation. Outcasts and off- the- radar- rejects were the first to hear and heed the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the God in our midst.

So what kind of unity could possibly bring all these outsiders, these on- the- edgers, together into a new oneness? It is not unity of cultures. It is not unity of liturgies and prayers. It is not a unity of theological systems or philosophical dogmas. It is not a unity of ideas or ideals. So what kind of unity is it? The oneness that Jesus prayed for is a oneness of heart and a oneness of love that I call lovemarks. Oneness for Jesus is a lovemark of hearts that have experienced the truth that God sent His son into the world “so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23).

Did you get it? Did you hear it? The love which united Father and Son is the love that the Son then passes on to each one who trusts in him. Love is the divine gift that defies all physics. When love is divided in two, you don't get half as much, you get twice as much. When love is hoarded, it shrinks. When love is given, it spreads.

Here is an example of what I mean. When you have a child, you love that child with all your heart, mind and soul. There is not love held back in reserve for a rainy day. Then you have another child. Does the love for your first child get winnowed down in order to make some love available for this new child? Of course not. Your love grows, expands, encompasses and envelops the new child. Love never has to be rationed. On the contrary, love must be overspent, over-extended, overdrawn, all the time- for that is the only way it can grow. It cannot be hoarded and set aside for some future date. Our own individual portions of love must be used up in full every day. If we follow that prescription, the more we use it the more it grows, then we are guaranteed an inexhaustible resource of love for our whole life.

What Jesus expects his disciples to share is his lovemark body to this world. The love of the Father for the Son, and the love of the Son for all his disciples is the lovemark of the church. Twenty-first century Christians are used to translating the term “Body of Christ” into the term “church.” Through the ongoing power of the Holy Spirit, the church integrates each new generation of followers and thus becomes the new presence of the Son, the Body of Christ, on earth.

So why do so many churches resemble cage fights more than loving faith communities? Why is the highest compliment some followers of Jesus can receive is for someone to say to them: “You know, you don't act like a Christian.” Why has the “unity of Christ” not brought about more “Beige believers” so much as it has “blood red battles?”

There are denominational battles galore, especially among the most numerically challenged. These battles are fierce and hard fought. Sometimes it seems as if the Body of Christ has been infected with a flesh-eating virus, intent upon consuming its own living flesh and cannibalizing

itself. Why are body-of-Christ battles now so bloody? Why are we known more for our scars than our lovemarks?

Could one reason be that when we think of the body of Christ we immediately think corporately, not corporally? We think of church life in terms of a corporate body of believers. But wait a minute: after years of some of the worst corporate betrayals and bamboozles ever recorded in US history, the concept of corporate, doesn't demand as much respect as it used to.

Hear me this morning: the body of Christ is NOT corporate. The Body of Christ is corporal. We are a living, breathing body that must work together in love to sustain our life, to ensure our future, and to leave lovemarks on the world. A corporal body is run by internal organs, which sustain and support each other. Every organ looks different. Every organ works differently. Every organ takes on different challenges.

Hearts pump blood, but they cannot filter it. Livers filter blood, but they cannot provide oxygen. Lungs suck in air, but they cannot provide food. Stomachs and intestines turn raw organic material into fuel for the body. Our DNA reads the same, for we are all part of the body of Christ. But both infinitesimal and infinite differences will always make each of us an unrepeatable, irreplaceable expression of God's love and grace. We are bound together as a One Body by love. But we work and play personally and uniquely to make that love manifest in the world.

So, this week, will you leave a LoveMark on the world? It's not enough to just leave fingerprints. We need to leave those lovemarks so others will know that we truly are the body of Christ.