

## Fingerprints and Lovemarks

John 17:20-26

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 Hammurapi (1792-1750 BCE), convicts were fingerprinted. In China as early as 246 BCE, fingerprints were used to "sign" legal contracts.

In 1788 a German anatomist, Johann Christoph 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.

Any CSI buffs here? You know micro-processors race and run at breakneck speed through millions of fingerprints in order to catch the bad guys or exonerate the good guys. 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 now to open sealed doors just by looking at them. Okay, more accurately just by looking through a retinal scanner, because the shape, diameter, and surface bumps of your baby blues (or browns, or greens) is completely unique to you.

Oh, and 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 in so many ways wholly and totally different from one another.** 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. 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 franchise faith? A lemming lifestyle? A monotonous monotone mission? Is every follower of Jesus expected to keep the same pace, have the same stride, move to the same rhythm?

No. When Jesus prayed for "oneness" he wasn't just looking around the Passover table and praying for those twelve individuals. He was praying for them, yes, but he was also praying for the next generation and the next. Jesus was praying for those who would come to faith because of the words and witness of those first twelve. And for the generation after that one . . . and the one after that . . . 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 homogeneity. 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, those in the margins and on the periphery, together into a new "oneness"? It's not unity of cultures. It's not unity of liturgies and prayers. It's not a unity of theological systems or philosophical schemas. It's not a unity of ideas or ideals. 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 Love-marks.** Oneness for Jesus is a love-mark of hearts that have experienced the

truth that God sent the 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 squandered, it spreads.

Here's an example of what I mean. When you have one child, you love that child with all your heart, mind and soul. There's no love held back in reserve for a “rainy day.” Then you have another child. Does the love for your first child get watered down in order to make some love available for this new love? 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. It's not hoarded and set aside for some future date. Our own individual portions of love must be used up in full everyday.

A love-mark is the unity of love – the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as they are poured out into the hearts of every disciple. That is the subject of Jesus' final prayer. Jesus was not praying that believers become doormats, accommodating everyone, everything, every idea, all in the name of some wishy-washy, “love” principle.

**What Jesus does expect disciples to incarnate is his love-mark body in this world.** The love of the Father for the Son, and the love of the Son for all his disciples is the love-mark 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 incarnate Body of Christ, on earth.

In the words of Arthur C. McGill in one of the most unjustly neglected books of the last twenty-five years, “The condition to which we are led by Jesus is a condition of utter dependence on God and relative dependence on one another. Jesus brings people to a condition where they need one another, where they call for help from one another and where they rely on one another. He does not offer a condition where people may so distribute and own commodities that they no longer have a need for one another. That is the rich person's poison—fear of need and of the needy. In Jesus Christ love thrives within need; it does not seek to remove and overcome need.”<sup>i</sup>

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.”

There are denominational battles galore, especially among the most numerically challenged. These battles are fierce and hard fought. Why are body-of-Christ battles now so bloody? Why are we known more for our scars than our love-marks?

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: a bureaucratized, routinized, institutionalized, rationalized organizational model riddled with secret pathways to power and prestige.

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 love-marks 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 I wonder. Will you leave a love-mark this week? It's not enough to leave fingerprints. We must also leave love-marks.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur C. McGill, *Death and Life: An American Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 90