



# World Wide Communion Sunday

October 3, 2021

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: Suite Brevis on "Beach Spring"

arr. David Lasky

## Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**All:** **You have set your glory above the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies.**

Liturgist: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars, which you have set in place, what are mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

**All:** **You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor.**

Liturgist: Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

*Psalm 8:1-5 adapted*

\* **All Singing:** **19 "For the Beauty of the Earth"**  
*Singing verses 1, 2, 4 and 5*

\* GOD'S GREETING

\* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

\* **All Singing:** 26 “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”  
*Singing verses 1, 2, 3 and 6*

*Children ages 2–7 may come forward for a brief word and blessing before they leave for “God Loves Me” and “Children in Worship.”*

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All:** **And also, with you.**

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**All:** **For he himself is our peace....**

Liturgist: His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.

### *Silent Confession and Reflection*

Liturgist: He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

**All:** **For through him we have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

*Ephesians 2:13-18 adapted*

Liturgist: Therefore, we believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.

**All:** **This unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.**

Liturgist: Through the working of God's Spirit, this unity, is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be sought after and earnestly pursued.

**All:** **Let the people of God be continually built up to attain reconciliation with one another.**

Liturgist: This unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

*From the Belhar Confession – South Africa, 1986*

Choir: “Hands Across the Universe”

by David N. Childs

Let us all sing a simple song, let us all sing a song;  
a song of peace, a song of hope, and a song of unity.

May our song of joy reach across the universe;  
may it touch upon the hearts of people in the world.

May our hands and our voices reach out to those who need it most,  
May our song of peace be heard by those who aren’t at peace.

## Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

\* **All Singing: 749** “**Spirit of the Living God**”

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

Minister: The Word of the Lord.  
**All: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: The Imprint of God

\* **All Singing: 224** “**Rejoice, the Lord is King**”

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**All Singing: 835** “**One Bread, One Body**”

ACCLAMATION

\* **All Singing: 831** “**Alleluia, Sing to Jesus**”  
*Singing verse 1*

## Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Liturgist: With joy, let us now offer our gifts, in music, heart, and resource, as a sign of our deep devotion and covenant faithfulness.

OFFERING

1. General Fund
2. Deacon Special Fund

Choir: “For Everyone Born” by Brian Mann arr. Tom Trenney

For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread, a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead, and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For woman and man, a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding the share, with wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man, a system that's fair, and God will...

For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song, the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong, and God will...

For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be, to work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be free, and God will...

\* **All Singing: 590** “**Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing**”  
*Singing verse 8*

**To God all glory, praise, and love be now and ever given  
by saints below and saints above, the church in earth and heaven**

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Sending**  
BENEDICTION

Postlude: "Peace Like a River" arr. Mark Hayes

**Worship Leaders**

Organist:	Lynn Hollender	Acolyte:	Trinity Simpson
Pianist (Postlude):	Mary Medema	Liturgist:	Kris Jousma
Choir Director:	David Baar	Prayer:	Dave Jousma
Accompanist:	Beverly Baar		
Violinist:	Frances Boerman-Cornell		
Minister:	Roger Nelson		

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)  
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 **Hope** 5825 W 151st Street, Oak Forest, IL 60452  
[www.hope-crc.org](http://www.hope-crc.org)

Text: Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12  
Title: The Imprint of God  
Date: 10.03.21  
Roger Allen Nelson

We don't know who wrote what we just read. It reads like a sermon, but the congregation for whom it was meant is also a mystery. And, we don't know when it was actually written. Biblical scholars give it about a 50-year window. So, we don't know who wrote this morning's text, to whom it was intended, or when it was written. There's a lot here that we don't know.

But, by lifting out hints and implications, listen to how one scholar describes the congregation for which Hebrews was intended.

*His congregation is exhausted. They are tired – tired of serving the world, tired of worship, tired of Christian education, tired of being peculiar and whispered about in society, tired of the spiritual struggle, tired of trying to keep their prayer life going, tired even of Jesus. Their hands droop and their knees are weak, attendance is down at church, and they are losing confidence. The threat to this congregation is not that they are charging off in the wrong direction; they do not have enough energy to charge off anywhere. The threat here is that, worn down and worn out, they will drop their end of the rope and drift away.*

Sound familiar?

A church consultant told me recently that he doesn't know a church that isn't exhausted, smaller, and frayed at the edges. Most are just trying to survive. Pandemic practices and politics, tribal boundaries, broken worship habits, uncertainty about the future, declining membership, deceased giving, and dissolving denominations have left congregations without enough energy to charge off anywhere. He worries about what will be left in a decade....

Dear friends, for the next month and a half we're going to work our way through Hebrews, because if this scholar and this consultant are right, then whomever the author was, he (or she) was writing to a congregation with whom we can identify.

If you're exhausted,  
or anxious,  
or thinking about dropping your end of the rope and drifting away,  
then I hope that this sermon series about a sermon  
has something helpful and hopeful for you to consider.

Now. What's interesting to me is that our author doesn't start with a congregational vision statement or the latest greatest church growth fad. He doesn't deal with worship styles, evangelism programs, or concerns about human sexuality....

He starts with proclamation about the nature of Jesus.  
He starts with a highfalutin theological statement about Jesus.  
He starts with a remarkable claim about Jesus.

Since Hebrews reads like a sermon, let's call the author "the preacher."

The preacher claims that God has been speaking through prophets.

Thomas Long writes that God has been communicating, "In many fragments and in many fashions in former times..." Or, in my words, the God of the universe is neither mute nor disinterested, but has spoken to his people through people. God chose prophets as vehicles for divine revelation.

But, while that was true then, now he has spoken through his Son.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way:

*He tried saying it in Noah, but Noah was a drinking man.... He tried saying it in Moses, but Moses himself was trying too hard; tried David, but David was too pretty for his own good. Toward the end of his rope, God tried saying it in John the Baptist with his locusts and honey and hell-fire preaching, and you got the feeling that John might have worked except that he lacked something small but crucial like a sense of the ridiculous or a balanced diet. So, he tried once more. Jesus is the mot juste of God.*

*Mot Juste*, borrowed from the French, means exact right word or phrasing....

Jesus is the exact word or phrasing of God. But the preacher goes one step further than that; the preacher writes that Jesus is the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."

A lifetime ago while teaching and coaching at Chicago Christian High School I was responsible for chapel leadership. One year someone approached us about showing the newest Jesus movie in chapel. They were convinced that this celluloid representation of the life of Jesus would capture student's interest and speak to their hearts and minds. I was sort of indifferent to the whole venture, but the idea barely got off the ground because....

Because, news of this cinematic-chapel-crusade reached a group of decidedly more conservative parents and pastors. They were appalled. They called the superintendent, the principal, and members of the school board. They couldn't believe that a Christian high school would so blatantly trample the second commandment.

*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them....*

They were worried that a movie depicting the life of Jesus was a graven image. They were concerned about the idolatry of making an image of God. If memory serves, my indifference and their offense ultimately shot down the chapel movie idea before the first screening.

First century Jewish-Christians would have been well aware of the second commandment. Their fundamental orientation would have been that God cannot or should not be captured by any image or art. In part because any image of God runs the risk of becoming an idol.

They would have remembered the story of the Israelites asking Aaron to “Make us a god who can go before us.” And Aaron in turn fashioning a golden calf, announcing, “This, O Israel is your God who brought you out of Egypt....”

In fact, Jews would have been so hesitant to approximate God by human creation that they avoid pronouncing the tetragrammaton – the four constants for the name of God. And instead of speaking God’s name they use other phrases like the Lord, or the Name.

Therefore, the claim that Jesus is an exact representation of God would have been met with consternation and confusion. How can anyone or anything be the likeness of God? Doesn’t that trample the first and second commandments?

And yet the preacher in our text is making the radical-revolutionary claim that Jesus is the “exact representation” of God. The word that is used here is related to minting a coin. It was used for the die or the engraving. Some translations have it as he “bears the very stamp of his nature.”

That’s more than speaking in fragments and fashions in former times.  
That’s more than reflecting his glory.  
That’s more than a graven image or a movie.

The preacher is proclaiming that there is no difference between the nature of God and the nature of Jesus. When you encounter one; you encounter the other – without dilution or hierarchy. Jesus corresponds exactly to God. To see or know Jesus is to see or know God.

To an exhausted first century church that was an audacious claim. And yet it was important enough that in 325 the church affirmed the same in the Nicene Creed by saying that Jesus is “the same essence as the Father.”

Now. Maybe that doesn’t seem like a big deal to you, or it doesn’t speak to the anxiety of today’s church. Maybe we should be talking about more edgy music or more compelling preaching....  
However, that Jesus is not simply a messenger, or an imitation, or a cheap knock-off, but is the exact imprint of God, is still an audacious claim. That God didn’t simply speak through prophets or teachers or some written text, but spoke through one who was of his very nature is still a breathtaking claim.

Jesper Svartvik puts it this way:

*The idea is that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s visible imprint in this world, the one who certifies how God values people. This is why Christology cannot be separated from anthropology.*

Jesus of Nazareth, the visible imprint of the invisible God, certifies how God values people. You and I and every-other-person-in-this-world are so valued that God sent/came/spoke in his exact nature. Every person – regardless of race, creed, color, orientation, ethnicity, work-ethic, skill-set, ability, body-shape, or net-worth – is ultimately so valued that God lived, died, and was resurrected in his exact nature.

May we see one another with that same conviction.  
May we engage friend and neighbor with that same essential grounding.  
May we live out of that confidence.  
May our church know that audacious faith.  
May we come to the table to commune with that God.  
Amen.