



## Look in the Mirror and See God: Imago Dei

Friday, November 28, 2014

Dear StillSpeaking Youth:

I have one request this holiday season: **look in the mirror and see God (Imago Dei)**. If no one has ever told you that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, allow me to share those precious and sacred words with you. If you don't believe me, check out a few translations of the scripture **Psalms 139:14**. It says:

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. (New Living Translation)

I will give thanks to you because I have been so amazingly and miraculously made. Your works are miraculous, and my soul is fully aware of this. (God's Word Translation)

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (New International Version)

It is my prayer that you believe and know for yourself with all of your heart, mind and soul that you are made in the beautiful image of our Lord. I pray you will take those sacred words and keep it close to you as a source of encouragement and affirmation through good and tough times. It is pretty exciting to know that when looking in the mirror—the image of God is looking right back at you. That's what the Latin term **Imago Dei** means. It is derived from the Hebrew term **Elohim** which means "God." How amazing to know that not only did God craft us and shape us; God knew us before we were even formed in our mother's womb. The scripture **Jeremiah 1:5** says:

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the Gentiles. (Jubilee Bible 2000)

I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations—that's what I had in mind for you. (Message)

It is for these reasons and more, I spent my thanksgiving in Ferguson, MO in community with young people just like you, with gifts, talent, creativity and a beautiful light all crafted and shaped by God. Many of the young people here in Ferguson are hurting because one of their brothers—Michael Brown, was unable to fully see his gifts and potential come into fruition. He died at the age of 18—only weeks before he was to leave for college. A poet, Langston Hughes would call the tragedy of Michael's death a "dream deferred." I came to Ferguson, MO to be in community with these amazing young people so they will know they are loved and celebrated by the faith community and we, as Christians, want their dreams to prosper and flow like a deep river or heavy stream of hope. I came to Ferguson to join in their holy and sacred chants that affirm:

**"Black and Brown lives matter" and "All lives matter."**

Many of these youth I've met are of color and they don't always believe their lives matter. They don't always believe they have a voice that is valued or heard. Many don't believe they will live to see 18 or go to college. This breaks my heart as Minister for Youth Advocacy and more poignantly as a human being.

I spent my Thanksgiving in Ferguson so I may hear the voices of these inspiring young people who to me exemplify a StillSpeaking faith that is courageous and prophetic. I walked with them and offered the same words I offer you: look in the mirror and see God—you are Imago Dei—the image of God.

There is a great deal of sadness, pain and suffering here in Ferguson and around our nation as our society examines race, racism, violence, class, human rights and social justice. Just recently, 12-year old Tamir Rice was killed when his toy gun was mistaken as a real one. Certainly this heightened the sense of grief and loss already deeply felt here in Ferguson and beyond.

Unquestionably, these are all very difficult topics to discuss and sometimes youth and young adults find creative and bold ways to engage it. I know I learn a lot from you when I witness your burgeoning wisdom. I want you to know that as a faith community, we can find the courage, boldness, creativity and strength to talk about these realities together. The message of love, hope, inclusivity and justice belongs to everyone—every youth—every life made in the magnificent image of our Lord.

What do the scriptures say about justice? The scripture **Amos 5:24** calls for justice to flow endlessly, much like the never-ending love and grace of God:

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream. (New Int'l Version)

Do you know what I want? I want justice—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want. (The Message)

This is what the youth and young adults of Ferguson, MO want and this is why they have spent over 100 days on the streets in their community collectively declaring “our lives matter, all lives matter.” I spent Thanksgiving in Ferguson because I believe that prophetic and divine affirmation is true for StillSpeaking Youth everywhere. That is what Christ's ministry was all about—an unprejudiced agape love for all.

Yes, your lives matter. Before you were shaped in your mother's womb, God knew you. You are fearfully and wondrously made. God has chosen you, StillSpeaking Youth. God has appointed and anointed your generation to be leaders and prophetic voices. Check out this conversation between Jeremiah and God:

**Jeremiah 1: 6-8 (New American Standard Bible)**

Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD....

Your voice matters and God has called you—even in your youth, to go forth and speak truth in love. The youth of Ferguson feel called to say “all lives matter.” Perhaps you feel called to speak out against hunger, bullying, autism, war, dyslexia, depression or peer-pressure. Or, maybe right now, you are simply listening, seeking and discerning your voice or call. If and when you choose to speak-out about what you know for sure to be your truth, remember, you are Imago Dei—shaped and chosen by God. Don't say you are only a youth. You are a StillSpeaking Youth walking in the witness and light of God.

I See God in You—

Rev. Waltrina Middleton, Minister for Youth, United Church of Christ | [www.ucc.org/youth](http://www.ucc.org/youth)