

1 Advent B

SoulPrints

Almighty God, tear open the heavens and come down. Take the clay of our lives into your skillful hands and shape us. Reform us where we are misshapen, make us whole where we are torn and broken. For you are the potter, we are the work of your hand, and we yearn for you. Amen.

Iowa Supreme Court reversed the murder conviction of Terry Harrington of Council Bluffs after 24 years in 2002. He was convicted of the 1978 murder of a Council Bluffs night watchman. Three years ago convicted killer Terry Harrington took the Brain Fingerprinting[®] test to establish his innocence. The results showed the records stored in his brain did not match the details of the crime scene.

The test was given in Fairfield, Iowa where you can find the home of Brain Fingerprinting. The creator, Dr. Lawrence Farwell developed it nearly two decades ago. It works by measuring a person's brain activity from their reactions to seeing details about a crime flashed on a screen. "When a person recognizes these details because of having been there and

committing the act, we get a particular brain wave that we can determine, measure and detect with a computer," says Farwell.

Specifically here's how it works: The brain stores information much like a computer, filing away images and scenes in its files. Wherever we go, whatever we do, the brain is planning, executing and recording information. And so, if we participate in a crime, for example, our brains have conveniently - and unavoidably - saved every image of the offense. The crime scene, the face of our accomplice, the weapon used - all are permanently registered in our brains.

- Harrington's brain indeed did not recognize the pictures. Details of the murder that would be familiar to the perpetrator failed to register in Harrington's knowledge assessment. No brain squiggle. No familiarity with the crime. Wrong guy.

Lying is trickier than it used to be. To confirm whether you're telling the truth, forensic neuroscientists are focusing on your head, not your heart. Lying alters brain wave patterns, makes your blood surge, and more.

Dr. Larry Farwell, the inventor of Brain Fingerprinting, can tell you're lying if only you'll let him fit you for one of his patented headbands equipped with sensors which allow him to measure your brain wave responses. Other technologies are in the works:

- A thermal imaging photographer can tell you're lying by picking up on the increased blood flow around your eyes.
- A neuropsychologist can tell - at least theoretically - that you're lying if your cerebral blood flow changes. When and if your brain remembers something, an obvious bloodstream surge is triggered.
- A robot can tell, again in theory, if your facial expression registers even the slightest micro-movement using automated face analysis.

Of all the latest technology, Brain Fingerprinting appears to be the most fail-safe. Farwell claims that his results are 99.9 percent accurate. Polygraph machines are considered archaic in the new world of Computerized Knowledge Assessment. Since liars can fool them and anxious truth-tellers can set them off, polygraph machines have a well-deserved reputation of unreliability. Who needs them? The latest brain

technology offers mind-searching tools, which in some cases are essentially infallible.

Like fingerprints and DNA found at a crime scene, Brain Fingerprints leave undeniable evidence determining where we have been and who really we are. Your brain can't help it. No use trying to hide the truth anymore.

The only problem with Brain Fingerprinting involves emotion or opinion. If you prefer - for reasons of diplomacy - to say, "Yes, dear, you really do look thinner in those pants" rather than saying, "Well, actually, you look like a doublewide trailer in those pants," you're safe: Brain Fingerprinting can not help since such statements do not involve memory.

As harsh as the truth may sometimes be, we all long to know who we are and what we are, even in relationships. Especially in relationships. Isaiah offers a stark little reminder.

It had been a long time since God had sent pillars of cloud by day and fire by night, rained food from the heavens or sent plagues upon Israel's enemies. God was keeping his distance, the people were idolatrous and disobedient and

they didn't seem to mind if it appeared that God was no longer minding the store.

But now, generations later, the Hebrews found themselves - once again - in despair. After exile in Babylon, they had returned home to Judah, but the trip was hardly glorious. They returned to harsh living conditions and an economy that offered little hope for prosperity. And so, the Hebrews fell into the old but familiar habit of bowing to the pagan gods the Babylonians so admired.

Isaiah hoped to shake the one true God out of retirement and back onto the national stage. What Judah needed were some images that would jog the brain, if not the soul, of the nation. Isaiah longed for the old days when God might tear open the heavens and shake up the scenery (v. 1). Boiling waters (v. 2). Trembling enemies (v. 2). Quaking mountains (v. 3).

Only God can detect the spirit of faithfulness in the heart and soul.

"Hit us!" Isaiah seemed to plead. "Give us your

best shot. Something we can't even imagine. Help us recover our memory of you!"

Isaiah admitted before the Lord that at least he -
Isaiah - remembered. And Isaiah believed that these images were filed somewhere -
somewhere - deep in the recesses of Israel's memory bank, too.

The Israelites' history with God had not only left Brain Fingerprints in their collective memory; their relationship with God had left permanent imprints upon their souls as well.

Didn't they remember, on some level, that they were clay and God was the Potter? That they had been utterly sinful and unfaithful? That they had once called God's name and fiercely took hold of God for stability?

And didn't God remember also? Didn't God remember that he is their Father? That they are God's people? Isaiah fussed that the sinfulness had resulted when God hid his face from them. No wonder we sinned! You, God, delivered us there when you stopped revealing yourself to us!

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Isaiah admitted that the sins of the people angered the Potter. But Isaiah also hoped that such iniquities could miraculously be erased from God's own knowledge assessment in spite of all evidence that we cannot genuinely forget anything.

Perhaps the relationship God had with the Hebrews was set forever, imprinted not only on their brains but on their souls as well. Perhaps God, also, bore the eternal imprint of these chosen and loved people. God had saved them from the Egyptians. God had given them the kings they requested. God had loved them with an undying love even throughout years of infidelity. The memory is a Soul-Print that no one can forget.

- The Soul-Print determines who we are and what we are. We are God's people, with the same Soul-Print as the ones led out of Egypt, and exiled to Babylon. They returned to their land only to find God missing. Ironically, after years of neglecting their soul many people return to the faith they once practiced. Clearly

God was not missing; God was merely silent, detecting that, yes, these people really do long to be faithful. This longing is found in your Soul-Print and it can be tracked somewhere in your spirit.

- Our Soul-Prints reveal that we were created to be in relationship with God. Sometimes God is silent and sometimes we are silent, but the relationship remains eternal.
- Our Soul-Prints reveal that we were created to enjoy and serve God. Our service often falters and we have been known to forget to enjoy life during the throes of our workaday worlds. But still, this information is imprinted upon our souls and we tend to recall it.
- Our Soul-Prints reveal that we were created to worship God, easily done when we notice the awesome power and uniqueness of God's will and God's ways.
- Our Soul-Prints reveal that we have been molded like clay by a Potter who created even the clay. Clay has the tendency to break down,

melt down, and shut down, which means that we need frequent repair and remolding.

The God who fashioned both the extraordinary human brain and the brilliant scientists who increasingly discover just how extraordinary it is, fashioned us in such a way that our souls would bear a gnawing desire to connect with the Holy. Even when God is silent, even when we realize that our own transgressions have distanced us from God's presence, something deep inside each of us detects that presence nevertheless.

Do these images seem familiar? A scene when God was present? The face of someone expressing a Godlike love? Does our blood surge? Do our facial expressions reveal that? Do these things ring a bell?

Our Brain Fingerprints reveal the visual moments of grace we can recall. But our Soul-Print reveals a God who is always present, and who will not be silent. **Only God can detect the spirit of faithfulness in the heart and soul.**

Draw near to God and prepare your soul for the coming of Christ. May he shake the very foundations of our lives. AMEN