

Becoming Who We Are

Shell-shocked soldiers presented a perplexing problem for the French Army following the conclusion of World War I. So shell-shocked were such soldiers, over 100 in number, that they had amnesia. They could not remember their own names. They were healthy in every other way, ready to return home to their families, but they could not remember their own identity. The French Army, due to a faulty record-keeping system, did not know who they were either.

Perplexing problem!

It was suggested that the French Army hold an identification rally in an effort to name these homeless heroes. After invitations to would-be families had been sent, interested parties were gathered in a large plaza in Paris. One by one these amnesia-ridden victims made their way to the microphone and pleaded, "Can anyone out there please tell me who I am? Can you please tell me my name?" Reporters gathered for the rally stated that few events in the entire war rivaled this one for its sheer drama.

Adolescents struggle with it, but the question of identity does not stop there. There is a vast array of influences and forces throughout our lives that want to tell us who we are. We can easily be led down unwanted paths if we're not aware. Who are you? Who are you now and who are you becoming? These are age-old questions that still haunt postmodern people.

For thousands of years the Christian has found his or her identity just as the apostle John described. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1a).

How blessed we are to be born into a world where God created everything "good." How blessed we are that God created us in his own image. And how very blessed we are that through the love he "lavished" upon us and our small, childlike faith - itself a gift from God - that now we are called children of God. It is ours, not because we have earned it, but because of his marvelous love and grace. How blessed we are that the Father should love us so!

As I think of how blessed we are, I cannot help but think of those children and adults who have never heard of the love of God. I think of those who have never known the love of an earthly parent or worse, have suffered abuse at the hand of an unloving one. I think of those who live lives of self-destruction, perhaps borne out of never knowing such love. I think of those who walk a painful path living lives warped by insecurity, hatred, and violence because they were raised in hatred and violence. How blessed are those who have not had to endure such.

I think about precious moments with our son. It is not always easy but always necessary to be intentional about the time I spend with him. He is learning every moment (even when it seems like he's not). He's learning from me – what I say, how I say it, when I say it; and, of course, what I do. That is such a sobering thought. I struggle these days with a sense of significance; I'm at a stage in life where I feel I ought to and can be a significant influence beyond the boundaries of my family.

Then I realize that the most significant role I have is that of a father. What I pass on to my children will have profound impact on their lives and all whom they encounter in this world. I think about all those without God's love who simply mimic the behaviors and attitudes of the crowd around them - for good or ill. I am all the more grateful to be redeemed as a child of God, even though I have done nothing to deserve it. I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he has made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for his own. It is our privilege and challenge to pass that sense of wonder and gratitude on to our children.

It would be hard to imagine anyone receiving more honors and accolades. He was the Associated Press' number one high school football and basketball player in America, 1961. He signed a college football scholarship to play for the legendary Paul "Bear" Bryant at the University of Alabama, where he was the starting quarterback in three major bowl games. He was chosen All-American, the "Most Valuable Player" in the 1966 Orange Bowl, Atlanta Touchdown Club's Most Valuable Player in the Southeastern Conference, 1965, and winner of the Sammy Baugh Trophy presented by the Columbus, Ohio, Touchdown Club, 1965. These are only a sampling of his many honors. But, Steve Sloan later stated that the greatest honor he ever received was from a less-than-friendly student who pushed him aside while passing him on his college campus and said, "Get out of the way, Christian!" The greatest honor he ever received was to be called Christian — a child of God.

We will never receive a greater honor than to be called Christian nor one that we deserve less! We belong to a family that none of us are good enough to be in! John reminds us: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

Yet an unbelieving world challenges our identity because we may order our lives by standards different from the popular mores of society. "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1b). We can be perceived as odd, misguided, intolerant or even dangerous. Still those who are called children of God give witness to the love of the Father through their lives, lived with a winsome care for others.

Then there are times when our witness is unbelievable because our lifestyles are no different from the unbelieving world. The nihilistic philosopher Frederick Nietzsche said, “If you want me to believe in your Redeemer, you first have to show me that you have been redeemed.” When our morality and lifestyles are no different than that of the unbelieving world, we give them the excuse they have been looking for to remain in disbelief. Yes, there are hypocrites in the church! But I cannot think of a better place for a hypocrite to be than in the church.

The apostle John continues, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). We *are* children of God and we *are becoming* children of God. We share Christ’s life today – for we inherit eternal life now - and we become more and more like him, a process to be completed in heaven.

But to become more of what we are, we must make a response. As Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, said, “The root of sin is the refusal to be what God has created us to be.” Why don’t we let God do all he wants to do with us? Mostly we’re afraid of change and we don’t trust God. Sometimes we wander from God or turn our backs on Him, but he wants to take us back.

I saw a sign in the hospital which read, “God loves me just the way I am and too much to let me stay that way.” Every child of God is an unfinished product. God “ain’t through with us yet.” There is a legend in which someone asks the great artist Michelangelo, “How are you able to take a simple, formless block of stone and from it produce a beautiful angel?” The sculptor replied, “It is simple. I just chisel away everything that does not look like an angel.” That’s what God can do with us, if we allow Him; sculpt, chisel, and chip away everything in us that does not look like who we are. God can transform us into the genuine children of God we were intended to be. Our purpose at First Church is to grow mature Christians. God wants us to be more than folks who warm a pew. God wants us to be more than folks who simply pay and pray. God wants us to be those people who live up to their calling as children of God. God wants Christians who are growing more Christ-like and who are not afraid to be called Christian; or ashamed for that matter.

“...when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2b-3). We all have work to do to live up to our name Christian — “Little Christ.” You may have heard the story of two caterpillars crawling around in the grit, grass, and dirt of the ground. Overhead was flying gracefully a beautiful multi-colored butterfly. Looking up, one caterpillar said to the other, “I know one thing. You’ll never get me up there in one of those contraptions!” But Christians aren’t caterpillars – we’re destined for a life above the grit, grass, and dirt. Don’t ever settle for an excuse that says, “That’s just the way I am.” No! That’s the

way you *were*. As Christians we are in the process of becoming who we really are; a process that will continue throughout our lives, to prepare us for that great day when we shall see Him as he is. There is no telling what God is going to do in our lives — in this world and the next – but it will be something great.

I know not how this saving faith to me he did impart, nor how believing in his word wrought peace within my heart.

But I know who I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.