

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word

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First Presbyterian Church

Clarksburg, WV

Romans 8:12-17

When we cry, "Abba!" "Father!" It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

(Romans 8:15-17 N.R.S.V.)

Do You Know Who You Are?

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

A hitch hiker out in California was shocked to realize that he had just climbed into a car driven by movie star, Michael Douglas. In the amazement of the moment the hitch hiker blurted out, "Do you know who you are?"

That will be my theme today. Do you know who you are? I had originally planned to preach on Acts 2 and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first disciples. But I found myself working on this passage from Romans. On the one hand I clearly made a mistake when I looked at my notes and started working on the scripture for next week. Yet I have found that the Holy Spirit uses even our mistakes for his glory. And finding myself drawn to this text is a good indication that this is a God thing. Apparently this is the right text for this congregation on this Sunday.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit witnesses to our hearts that we are the very children of God. Do you know who you are? There is tremendous peace and power in knowing our true identity.

Here is the thing. When we do not know our true identity, we take on the false identity of the world around us. In short we become what other people think we are.

The world is always telling us that we are not good enough, that we are not pretty enough, that we are not skilled enough. The world delights in telling us that we are unlovable failures. But the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts the real truth. We are the very children of God. God loves us no matter what.

You remember the story in Luke of the prodigal son who demanded his inheritance early and ran away from home. In Jewish society that was beyond rude. It was as if the boy had said to his dad, "I wish you were dead so I could get my inheritance." The prodigal son took his money

early and ran away. The father in this story is the image of God. The father keeps hoping his son will come back. He worries about whether his son is still alive. He spends days looking down the road hoping to see his son returning. And when finally the boy comes dragging back in shame and humiliation, the Father sweeps him up in his arms and throws a great celebration for him.

That is how God feels about you. Max Lucado probably didn't come up with this poem, but whoever did spoke truth.

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.
 If God had a wallet, your photo would be in it.
 He sends you flowers every spring.
 He sends you a sunrise every morning.
 Whenever you want to talk, he listens.
 He can live anywhere in the universe, but he chose your heart.
 Face it, friend -God is crazy about you.

Too many of us spend our lives laboring under a mistaken sense of identity. One man was telling about walking through a crowded shopping center. Suddenly a man came up to him, slapped him on the back and said, "Joe, you are looking better than ever."

The man said, "You must be mistaken, my name is Sam."

The other fellow looked at him a moment and then said, "And you even changed your name. I love it! Way to go!"

The Devil continually whispers lies in our ear. He whispers lies of mistaken identity, or false identity. Here's the thing, Friends, we do not have to accept these lies.

Eleanor Roosevelt famously said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

I experienced this myself as a teenager. One of my classmates one day started calling me "pigears." Much to my dismay, that nickname stuck. I hated it. But the more I protested, the more delight the boys got out of calling me by that name.

I endured that awful name for a couple of years before I realized that I didn't have to answer to it. Someone had said, "Hey pigears," and I caught myself looking up and answering, "Yeah what?"

So I decided that if someone wanted my attention they were going to have to call me John or I wouldn't answer. The nickname did not immediately go away, but did immediately lose power.

You would think that after an experience like that, I would have learned that lesson. Apparently it is a lesson that I need to keep relearning and relearning as I go. I thank God that the Holy Spirit is patient with me and keeps reminding me of the truth that really matters. I am who God says I am. I can do what the Holy Spirit says I can do. Whatever other people may say or think, I

am still, and forever will be, a child of the king, an heir to the kingdom, a beloved child of God. That is who you are too.

What I am talking about is more than simply thinking positively. Sports psychology has long since discovered the power of thinking positively. For example, when a basketball player approaches the free throw line for a critical shot, he is told to think about the last time that he sank such a shot in an important game. Then the player is to imagine that this shot will be just like that. That kind of positive thinking does enhance performance, no doubt about it.

What I am talking about, however, goes beyond that. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will guide us, not into a truth, but into the truth. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. (John 16:13) The Holy Spirit overcomes the lies of the world by helping us see truth.

The Holy Spirit doesn't just spin things so that we are concentrating on the positive aspects. The Holy Spirit demonstrates that we are loveable, that we are capable, that in Christ we are over-comers. As Paul says in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

This morning I invite you to do a little exercise called speaking truth to lies. I invite you to take a piece of paper from your bulletin and to write down two or three lies that you need to get rid of. I am not talking about ridiculous lies like my hair is blonde or I'm a professional body builder. I am talking about the kind of insidious lies that God has already revealed to us are lies - yet we keep giving them power. (This idea came from Dynamic Preaching, April - June 2015, pg. 56)

Things like, "If I weigh more than 120 pounds, no one will find me attractive."

Or this one, "Because I can't do the things I used to do, I am no good."

Or, "I don't have a problem with drugs or alcohol."

Or, "If I weren't so needy, or noisy or nosy, the abuse would stop."

Or, "I'm not smart enough," Or "good enough." Or "strong enough."

Write down the lies that God is revealing to you now. These lies that have to go.

When you get done writing, fold the paper in half and hold on to it while others finish.

Now hold your paper up and rip it up with me as you hear these affirmations

1. I declare to you with the authority of the Holy Spirit, that these are lies.
2. You are a child of God, and of infinite value.
3. You are created in the image of God. Christ dwells in you and you in Christ.

I declare to you by the authority of the Holy Spirit,

1. You are not chained to your past nor defined by your mistakes.
You are forgiven.
2. In God your future is wide open, and through God you will bear good fruits for the kingdom.
3. God isn't finished with you yet. He is working on a masterpiece in you.
4. You are a precious child of God, his love is poured out upon you even now.

Continue to let the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, speak truth to you and break the power of these lies.

Then when you are ready, come forward down the middle aisle and throw your lies in the trash can where they belong.

One last thing, sometimes we lay our troubles before God in prayer, but then we finish praying we pick them back up again. When you leave the sanctuary today, leave these lies in the trash can. Trust the Holy Spirit. Live by Truth!

Amen.