

I want to begin by asking you all a question... What is your identity? Who are you? That is, you were called up to the front and asked to introduce yourself ... what would you say? Take a few moments to carefully think over that as we are going to be revisiting this question at the end of the sermon... WHO ARE YOU?

But in the mean time... lets ask ourselves another question... "What is IDENTITY?"

In psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and in the dictionary... identity is defined as the conception, qualities, beliefs, and expressions that make a person UNIQUE... different from others... To put it simply... Its what MAKES YOU. YOU. And not me. Identity is what MAKES YOU... YOU...

THIS IS why IDENTITY is SO IMPORTANT.. WE LIVE out of our IDENTITY... IT shapes HOW we live... and THINK...

But what happens when we don't know our identity? What happens when we don't know who we are? Well.. many things happen...BUT one of the saddest things is that we BEGIN TO LOSE our ability to mourn. We all know what this looks like..If we haven't been there ourselves.. we have seen them on the movie screen or on the news... how people going through an identity crisis slowly become lifeless and lose the ability to MOURN and process grief EVEN when something horrible happens...

For instance.. following the collapse of the world trade centre back in 9/11, Americans rallied around the American flag in a outpouring of patriotism... and grief...

Similarly, just last year, on Nov 13... after the Paris shootings... the French flag was seemingly raised on every street as the nation as a whole... grieved over what happened...

Not so in Belgium.

On the morning of March 22, 2016... 3 men... strapped with frag bombs containing bolts and nails... led a coordinated suicide bombing attack at the airport and metro station inside the city of Brussels...that is, the capital of Belgium... leaving 35 dead... and more than 300 injured...

If we could have the next slide.. The Eiffel Tower and the Empire State building led the world in mourning by lighting up the colours of the Belgian flag.. black, yellow and red... BUT... these same colours were conspicuously absent in the streets of Belgium...

Dan Bilefsky, writing for the New York Times... notes something VERY IMPORTANT... the reason for Belgium's response... OR LACK thereof... lies in its identity crisis...

Politically, this tiny country with a population of 11 million is fragmented and divided between the Dutch Flanders to the north and the French Wallonia to the south... To give you a quick snapshot of how bad it is... BELGIUM once went without a government for 541 days, and currently has 3 residing Parliaments. Whats even more shocking is that until last year, there were 19 DIFFERENT police forces in the nation's capital, that is Brussels.... 19 POLICE FORCES for a CITY of a population of under 200 THOUSAND...

TO give you an idea of just how crazy that is, VANCOUVER has a population of just over 600 thousand and we have ONE police force... THE VPD. BUT a BRUSSELS - not even ONE THIRD the size of VANCOUVER had 19 DIFFERENT police forces... that did not share INTEL with one another. It is also divided into 19 different municipalities with 19 DIFFERENT mayors... This is made all the more ironic by that fact that Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium.. It is the capital of the entire European Union, As well as the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty organization...

Following this tragic terrorist attack in Brussels, ONE thing is clear. The people of Belgium lack identity... and THAT loss of national, municipal... and ultimately individual identity finds its expression in the fact that the THE REST of the WORLD seems to MOURN MORE for Belgium than BELGIUM can mourn for itself!

Identity is important. Without it, WE will not be able to PROCESS let alone handle times of crisis. And the Bible warns us...ITS COMING! BE READY! Trials OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES are COMING! SO BE READY... KNOW WHO GOD IS and WHO YOU ARE IN HIM...

This week and next week... we are going to talk about identity... And you might think... we are Christians... Of course we know our identity.. we are sons and daughters of God. Well, you would be surprised.. This past week, I was busy marking papers for school - and on Monday, I remember it clearly.. It was so nice outside... But I spent my day off inside a cafe... reading through hundreds of pages of mostly poorly written papers ... on the subject of IDENTITY. And I was SHOCKED at how many people did not have a proper sense of identity... These are Christians! Attending Bible College. Mind you, most of them are in their freshmen year or sophomore... But COME ON!

These are the future leaders and pastors and worship leaders... AND a lot of them HAD NO clue.... I was spending hours literally reading through ME ME ME ME..... And if you guys know anything about me at this point, its that I don't like "me me me me.... talk.

SO guess what. I gave a lot of low grades... didn't FAIL anyone... but I did come down hard...

BECAUSE... when it comes to identity... it doesn't matter so much what you think of yourself as what GOD THINKS OF YOU.

Let me say that again.. Because this goes against everything that the world would have you believe.

When it comes to your identity. It doesn't MATTER one ZIP what you think of yourself BUT what God THINKS of you.

So what does God think of you?

Well first of all. 1. You are IMMENSELY VALUABLE.

It does not matter if you are the world's BIGGEST LOSER with no job and no kids... no wife... heck even no friends.. I doesn't matter whether you are a radical MUSLIM or an atheist... it doesn't matter if you land somewhere on the LGBT spectrum... whether you are an obnoxious prick with lots of money like Donald Trump.. or if you are not doing well in SCHOOL...

NONE of that MATTERS. EVERY single human LIFE... from the womb to the elderly home... is EQUALLY precious AND IMMENSELY VALUABLE... BECAUSE. God. CREATED YOU. But not only did God CREATE you...the Bible teaches that God created us in His own image...

He has taken GREAT CARE to FORM us and CREATE US WITH LOVE.. and have put in us His divine image....

So first of all. You are immensely valuable BECAUSE you are God's creation and bear His ETERNAL image. And what should our response be? Worship.

Ps. 139:14.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Next time you look in the mirror, don't just fix your hair or pop your pimples... PRAISE GOD!

Second

And how good would it be if we could end the sermon here ... We are all FEARFULLY and wonderfully made. But no. The Bible goes on to say... that we are FOOLS. We are suckers. We are SINNERS.... We have exchanged the glory of God for images.. and HAVE BECOME FOOLS.... The Bible goes even far as to call us spiritual WHORES.... prostituting ourselves to MONEY... FAME... POWER... SUCCESS.. when our HEARTS were MADE for God and God alone...

And in that DARK exchange... essentially what we did was SPIT in the face of the King of kings.. SAYING - GOD - you are not WORTHY of my PRAISE and my HEART and my DEVOTION. MONEY IS! ENTERTAINMENT IS! WORK IS! FAMILY IS! BUT NOT YOU! the DIRT on the ground is more VALUABLE than you... I will bow down and pay homage to DIRT .. but I will not bow my knee to JESUS...

And that is human history.. men have literally worshipped the dirt of the ground... while suppressing the truth...

So not only are you IMMENSELY VALUABLE... BUT you are ALSO more sinful than you will ever know.... What then, should our response be? Repent? Yes.. but more than that,, we need to have a REPENTANT SPIRIT!..

Psalm 139:14..

23Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
24And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

When I was young.. I remember a vague question forming in my mind as I read the Bible.. I couldn't put it into words back then... but the question was essentially this... Why in the world does David ask God to reveal to him the HIDDEN sins of his heart?

I mean... ignorance is bliss! IF that statement were EVER true...THIS would be it! IGNORANCE of your sins is bliss right? Why would you want to KNOW your SIN more than you already do? I mean, I already feel pretty crappy about myself.. SO WHY are Christians SO OBSESSED with KNOWING their SINS that they would even PRAY to God to reveal it to them? OTHER religions PRAY for STUFF... Christians PRAY to GOD TO SHOW THEM HOW SINFUL THEY ARE! WHY???

Augustine once said near the end of his life...that as you grow in spiritual maturity... you will see yourself as a worse sinner. That doesn't make sense at first.. I mean, if you are GROWING doesn't that mean at the very least you are sinning less than before? YES...

But the true measure of spiritual maturity is not how sinless you are... BUT how much you appreciate and know more and more how precious the cross is... And in order to APPRECIATE the CROSS.. WE MUST KNOW our SINS! So we pray.. LORD. REVEAL TO ME MY SINS.. even the ones I don't know ABOUT!

The principle at work here is the darker the canvas... the brighter the diamond...

Paul used this same PRINCIPLE in Romans where he argues that where SINS increases ... GRACE abounds all the more!!!

And the reason WHY WE CAN KNOW OUR SIN DEEPLY.... and pray to GOD to reveal to us MORE of our SIN AND not fall into despair is because NOT only are we MORE SINFUL than we know... TRUE CHRISTIANS KNOW that they are also MORE LOVED than we can ever imagine...

You would think.. wouldn't you... that God would DESPISE us... look at how UGLY we are... cringe back in disgust... and just leave us to die! But He doesn't... In what is perhaps the most graphic chapter in the Bible... that is, Ezekiel chapter 16.. it writes...

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. 5No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

And when I, that is God, passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, LIVE. Yes, I said to you in your blood, Live.!"

When all that we deserved was to be abandoned and left to rot... God SPOKE words of LIFE over us and LOVED us... and it goes on to say how he asked us and clothed us....

This is where the GOSPEL kicks in...

Here's the good news! GOD LOVES SINNERS!

Not only are you more sinful than you will ever know... but you are also MORE LOVED than you can ever imagine...

Not only are you more sinful than you will ever know... but you are also MORE LOVED than you can ever imagine...

And this love.. Its not abstract... Its not floating around up in the air... without definition and shape.. its not a general love... Its is a peculiar and specific love ... in the shape of a CROSS...

Romans 5:8 ... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! AND having died for us... He gave to us the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the DEAD... (Romans 8:11)... that is the spirit of ADOPTION through His Holy Spirit BY WHOM we cry out to God - ABBA, Father!

THAT IS OUR IDENTITY... YES we ARE VALUABLE because of the divine image.. YES WE ARE DIRTY BECAUSE OF SIN... BUT MUCH MORE -

WE ARE LOVED BY GOD OUR FATHER AND at the end of the day... we are HIS CHILDREN....

It is so important that you get this... Our IDENTITY is ROOTED in the PERSON and WORK of JESUS CHRIST... In fact, something which I have found really helpful with this.. is as I'm reading my Bible.. to just highlight the phrase "in Christ".... ITS EVERYWHERE and ITS MIND BLOWING! And the implications OF IT ARE SHOCKING! WE ARE IN CHRIST!

You see. OUR identity is NOT determined by our self worth or what we CAN DO... Whats more, we ARE NTO THE SUM OF OUR CHOICES OR THE SUM OF OUR MISTAKES....Rather.. when GOD looks at us, He sees us clothed in the righteous and perfections of His Son.... NOT only are we valuable because we bear the divine image.. BUT we HAVE also been purchased by the PRECIOUS blood of His Son!

This is our identity...!! We are sons and daughters of God.. Are you MIND BLOWN??? I am a divine image bearer who has spat on the face of the king of kings... AND INSTEAD OF EXECUTION... I AM MADE INTO ROYALTY!!! Instead of becoming a son of hell...and have everything taken from me... I AM A SON of GOD and a HEIR of the UNIVERSE!!! Look it. sometimes this is all so abstract ... But what that's meant to accomplish in us is a profound.. day by day.. moment by moment appreciation of the fact that WE are DEEPLY LOVED by GOD.

And I know that as we live through life... sometimes it just doesn't feel LIKE YOUR LOVED... BUT God doesn't exist to PANDER to our EVERY FELT NEED. HE HAS FIXED THE CROSS UPON the APEX of HISTORY so that ALL people who FIX their eyes on the cross might know that they ARE LOVED! If there was ever a moment that God displayed His love for you - it was at the cross.

Because that where it ALL happened! NOT only were you saved FROM sin and HELL.. but you were SAVED toward GLORY HONOUR AND PRAISE. You were adopted into the family of the king of kings...!!

Here's what that means... for you... and for me... And this might be what you call the practical application part of the sermon... Starting last year... I have tried my best to start everyday by waking up and mentally reminding myself as I brush my teeth or wash my face... I look into the mirror and say.... YOU HANDSOME MAN... I'm just joking. I don't actually say that.. I look into my eyes and I remind myself..I am a Son of God... which means... one day, I HAVE AN INHERITANCE that is COMING TO ME... I WILL INHERIT God's CREATION - THE UNIVERSE... MY SINS have been forgiven.. I am RIGHTEOUS... GLORY HONOUR AND PRAISE... IS COMING TO ME... And when you begin to live life in that mindset... everything else starts falling into place... the world and all its troubles grow slowly DIM... they are not as big ANYMORE in the face of ETERNAL GLORY...

and all the BLESSING of this world...meh.. its like the cherry on top. It doesn't really matter if I get it. Sure. I like cherries... but you can have the cherries cause I"VE got the CAKE!

Let me end by asking one more time... WHO ARE YOU..? When you hear that .. is the REFLEX of your heart and mind SAYING... I am a mother.. I am a father... someone's husband? A doctor? businessman? Student? Electrician?

We are all of those things.. YET at the same time... none of them. In Christ, we are SONS and DAUGHTERS of GOD. PERIOD. THAT is the ONLY identification we are going to be carrying around in heaven.

Lets pray.