

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles

“You are a Child of God” Series 1

*Sermon Series: Who Do You Think You Are?
Finding Your True Identity in Christ.*

Ephesians 1:1-14

January 16, 2022

Do you remember as a child how we use to say, “Sticks and Stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me.” The problem is, they can do more than hurt; they can kill.

Two girls committed suicide after being harassed and cyber bullied. Two girls whose life was all in front of them; who began to believe the filth that others said about them. Two young lives lost because they believed what other people said about them and because of the circumstances of their life became intolerable.

We allow ourselves to be defined by our looks, or our possessions, positions, who we hang out with or are not able to hang out with. We define ourselves by what has been done to us, or what we do. Most people don’t have a good sense of who they are, and so are open to being manipulated into doing and being that which they are not.

Too often we do believe what others say about us instead of believing what God said about us. The truest thing about you is what God said about you. The problem is most people – even most believers - don’t know what God has said about them and so they live life like orphans, abandoned and confused.

Ephesians is a book that addresses that problem of identity and informs us that the truest thing about you is what God has said about you and He said you are child of God, you are blessed, you are of value, you are chosen, you are precious in His sight, you are loved and you are forgiven. And so much more.

Over the course of the next few months we will be looking at what God says about you and discovering who we are “in Christ”.

Why does this matter? It matters because once we know who we are in Christ, and our place in God’s plan, we begin to grasp a vision of our true value and worth. And once that happens, we begin to live accordingly and it becomes increasingly difficult to be controlled or manipulated by the world around us.

Our identity doesn’t come from what happens or has happened to us or what is said about us. It comes from being a child of God.

I

As a child of God we are given a new sense of **identity**. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”*

Too often our identity comes from what others say about us. We put too much stock in what others say.

Did you know that after Fred Astaire had his first screen test, the memo from the testing director of MGM, dated 1933, said, "Can't act. Slightly bald. Can dance a little." Astaire kept that memo over the fireplace in his Beverly Hills home.

An expert said of Vince Lombardi: "He possesses minimal football knowledge. Lacks motivation." Socrates was called, "An immoral corrupter of youth." Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, was encouraged to find work as a servant or a seamstress by her family.

Beethoven handled the violin awkwardly and preferred playing his own compositions instead of improving his technique. His teacher called him hopeless as a composer. The parents of the famous opera singer Caruso wanted him to be an engineer. His teacher said he had no voice at all and could not sing. Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor for lack of ideas. Thomas Edison's teachers said he was too stupid to learn anything. Einstein did not speak until he was four and didn't read until he was seven. His teacher described him as "mentally slow, unsociable and adrift forever in his foolish dreams." Newton did very poorly in school. The sculptor Rodin's father said, "I have an idiot for a son." Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace*, flunked out of college, and was described as "both unable and unwilling to learn."

Why am I telling you this? Because, so many people tell us that we can't do it, and then we start to believe it.

What would have happened if they had believed what people were saying about them? We would have lost some of the great minds and actors and artists and writers and leaders of the world.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that it is not important what people say about us. It is only what God says about us that matters. For the truest thing about you is what God says about you and He said, "I chose you". So our identity doesn't come from the opinions of others but our relationship with Him.

The story is told about a well-known speaker who started off his seminar by holding up a \$20-dollar bill. In the room of 200 he asked, "Who would like this \$20-dollar bill?"

Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this to one of you but first, let me do this. He proceeded to crumple up the 20 dollars. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still hands went up.

Well he replied, "what if I do this" He dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, or crumpled and dirty. "Now", he said, "who still wants it?" Still the hands went up in the air.

My friends, we have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money you wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth 20 dollars in your hearts.

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way or the way we are treated by others.

We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened, or what will happen to you, no matter what people have done to you or said about you; you will never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to God Who created you and chose you to be his child.

II

As a child of God, belonging offers one a sense of identity, and a **feeling of liberty**.

And Paul said, *“He blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”*

Children have a natural zest for life. I've often wondered if children are able to walk. I've never see one do it – at least not around me. They seem to fly or jump, dance every place they go. Their feet very often never touch the ground. I know that is true in my house. We always have music on. And so, it would seem the children never ever walk anywhere. They dance.

I remember on one occasion I was sitting and listening to music and writing, when one of my children walked very deliberately into the room. I was startled--it was so unnatural--because she wasn't dancing. I looked up and said, "Darling, there's music, why aren't you dancing?"

Well, there was a problem, and it had stopped her from being able to feel light on her feet. So we spoke, and when she left, she did so dancing.

It was C.K. Chesterton who said, Angels can fly, because they take themselves so lightly. Yet, we deal with life deliberately, so we find ourselves unable even to dance. Maybe, that's why children seem too much, at times, like angels; for when their hearts are light, their feet seem hardly to touch the ground.

That is where I want to begin this morning. When we talk about being alive to life, of being vital or being numbed--I want to say there is music; why aren't you dancing?

Blake understood this feeling of liberty when he looked at the sun he saw not a circle of light, but a circle of the company of angels singing, Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God almighty."

There is music, why aren't you dancing?

"This is my Fathers world
and to my listen ears
all nature sings and round me rings
the music of the spheres"

What all this means is that we are not human beings having a spiritual experience; rather we are spiritual beings having a human experience. We are citizens of two worlds – the heavenly one and the earthly one.

That was what Paul was saying that the Lord has “Blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places...”

Any one of you who have travelled abroad has experienced that sense of being citizens of two worlds. And just as you remain a Canadian citizen whenever you travel abroad to another country – whether that is Africa, Europe Asia or the Middle East – you travel with all the rights and privileges that that Canadian citizenship holds. Sure we have to follow their laws, but we have the protection as Canadians.

The freedoms and liberties that we enjoy as Canadian citizens are not enjoyed by citizens of many countries; and yet, even when we travel to those very countries we still enjoy the protection of our own as citizens of Canada.

As citizens of God's Kingdom, as believers and Christians, we have all the rights and benefits and blessings that citizenship offers.

Many of us as Christians continually ask God for what He has already given. We pray for Him to give us more love, but as citizens we have been promised that "the love of God has been poured out with in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). We pray for peace, although Jesus already gave us that gift of peace but often like an unwrapped gift we have not opened it and made use of it. For he said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." (John 14:27) They pray for happiness and joy, although that too is a gift of citizenship for Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full." (John 15:11) They ask for God to give them strength, although His word tells us we "can do all things through Him who strengthens" us. (Phil 4:13)

Not knowing our rights as citizens of the Kingdom of God and Children of God is part of our problem and results in our lacking in liberty.

Do you think that Prince Charles ever questions his rights or privileges as a member of the royal family? Now think, even if he were to get amnesia from concussion- it would not stop him having those rights or privileges -though he would have forgotten they were his to have. And so, he would not have the awareness that he could make use of them until he "came to himself".

Listen, let me tell you who are you are? You are a child of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Adopted into the family and household of God with all the rights and privileges whether you have the awareness yet to live in that identity and liberty.

III

As Children of God belonging offers one a sense of identity, feeling of liberty, but also an **assurance of security**. *"Just as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."*(4-6)

He predestined or predetermined, decided before hand, to adopt you as his daughter and or son. Your security is assured. No longer do you need to feel insecure, defenseless, or anxious for adoption changes everything. It gives us an assurance of security and belonging.

I remember a little boy who was adopted into a family after coming from such desperation and deprivation that where ever he was place he hoarded everything everything he could find and thought he could carry when he left. Prior to being adopted he would hoard food under the bed he was sleeping on and take clothing and stick in a bag in the closet. This behavior continued after he was adopted. Finally, the father sat the little boy down and said, "Listen my darling, you are my son and you can hide food under your bed if you want and cloths and toys in a bag; but come with me." He took the boy to the kitchen and opened the fridge and said, "All this food is yours whenever you want it. And the cloths in your closet and the bed are yours. The boys eyes grew wide and guess what, 'What said the boy?', 'the room is yours and the home you are in is ALL yours. It is already yours. You just have to believe it and rest in it.'" Slowly, that began to sink in. And he stopped hoarding and just started belonging.

Frost wrote in his poem, "The Death of the Hired Man" that "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in". *"Just as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ..."*

There was a little boy who had spent his whole spring building a wooden boat from scratch. When summer arrived he took the boat he had so lovingly made to the seashore and placed it in the water. But before he knew what was happening the waves and the current took it out. He was unable to get it back. So after all his work he lost his boat.

A year or so went by and he was walking by a used clothing and furniture store and to his surprise he saw his boat in the window. He ran in and said, "Mister, that boat is mine. I built it with my own hands." "The owner said, "the boat may have been yours but now it is mine. And if it is going to be yours; you are going to have to pay for it." So all that summer he did work to earn the money to buy back his boat. The day came when he had enough money and he went in, paid the store owner and left with his boat. And he could be heard saying,

I made you
I lost you
I found you
I bought you
Now, you are mine.

Listen, our Lord says the same thing to you and to me. I made you, I lost you to the world, I found you, I bought you--I paid the price. Now, you are mine. Isn't it good to know that you belong.

You think about that. Amen.