Ephesians 1:1-6 Ephesians 2:13-22

*Jesus-Shaped Identity* (*Values of the Evangel* – Part 1)

By now most of you have learned a little about the Fellowship of Presbyterians – a movement within our denomination that is committed to reclaiming true focus on the gospel, to help build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ. In the effort to help our congregation know what’s really at the heart of this movement, we’re going to spend the season of Lent and the first part of the Easter season looking at their 9 core values – values that, in reality, have their *root* deepwithin our Reformed tradition as Presbyterians.

The very first value – the one which informs the rest – is a “*Jesus-Shaped Identity*.” This means we believe Jesus Christ must be at the *center* of our lives and making *disciples* of Jesus at the core of our ministry. [*Pause*]

I want you all to try something for me; I want you to pretend I’m a new visitor here … or a new neighbor you meet in town. Now I’m going to ask you something, and I want you all to think about what you’d say – you get 10 seconds to think about it - Ready … “Tell me about Jesus” … (***Pause***) What did you think? What would you say? … How many of you started your answer with the words, “Jesus was” … either Jesus was a great teacher … or Jesus was the Messiah, or even Jesus was the Son of God? … If so, let me ask, why are you speaking of Jesus in the past tense – like he’s an ancient historical figure … If we first think of Jesus as a character from the past – no matter how much reverence we feel for him … we need a major shift in our thinking … because Jesus ***is!*** Jesus *is* the risen Lord … Jesus is my God … Jesus is my Savior … I spoke to him this morning and he told me again that he has things under control. If we’re going to have a Jesus-shaped identity, we can never forget who Jesus is right now.

Speaking of forgetting, how many of you have seen the movie, *The Bourne Identity*, with Matt Damon? I’ll be honest, I really like the movie and its sequels. In the first film, “The Bourne Identity,” we discover what it’s like when you forget who you are. Jason Bourne is a highly trained, specialized agent of the US government. He has tremendous fighting skills, as well as a keen ability to read dangerous situations, and strategically overcome obstacles. But, Jason has forgotten who he is. In one battle with a bad guy, Jason is shot and nearly drowns. The trauma causes him to have amnesia.  
 At one point Bourne questions who he is. He’s sitting in a restaurant and he’s watched every car in the parking lot, memorizing every license plate, and can close his eyes and tell you with detail about the appearance of every person sitting in the restaurant. And he asks, “Who does this kind of thing?” It’s a *great question* because the answer is relevant to his lost identity. The person “who does this kind of thing” is a secret agent.  
 When another bad guy attacks him, Jason instinctively deflects the enemy’s blows and knocks out his opponent. When hearing a foreign language spoken across the room, he not only understands but returns a comment and thereby discovers that he knows that language… Slowly, it all came back to him … and he made full use of who he was.

Here we see that our identity is important because it determines our activity. So … let me remind you about *your* “Born” identity. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that we are children of God if we have confidence in our relationship with God. How did we become children of God, confident and without shame? Jesus says this becomes so when you are born of God – specifically born of the Spirit. He tells us that just as you were born physically of a mother and father in this world, you must also be born spiritually of your heavenly Father. This is where the phrase “born again” comes from. You have been adopted off of the ghetto streets of this world into God’s family. And it’s crucial that every day, we remember our identity.

I once heard an illustration about these little red wooden sticks. They lived in a bucket of red paint. All day long, they swam and they swam in the red paint. Then, one day, a friend invited them to go swimming in the paint can next door. The little red sticks were excited to try something different, so they all jumped in with both feet. But, lo and behold, the paint can they jumped into was blue, so now they were little blue sticks. They lost their identity. Yes, I know it’s a little corny, but it helps make my point.

In the scripture lesson for today from Ephesians, Paul drives home the point that believers look different from the rest of the world. How different are we from the world around us? This is important: Jesus’ actions don’t only set a pattern worthy of imitation, they give us new *identification* – we’re no longer citizens of this world – we’re foreigners … *resident aliens* – because our citizenship has been transferred, and Christ is the proof of our true home. And God stamped the legal papers at our baptism, with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

All of this sets a new standard. We no longer live like the world. But here’s the important thing – *don’t miss this* – a lot of people hear this part of Paul’s message – to no longer live like the world, and as a result stop living in the world – they stop living *with* the world, but that’s *not* Paul’s point, and it wasn’t Christ’s either – the whole point of being different is to be different ***in*** the world, among those who are still stuck in the world’s ways. The worst thing we could do is hear this message about being different and then decide, “Yep, since we’re different, let’s just stick together and do our own thing, since other people don’t understand us anyway.” No!! That’s the opposite of what we should do. We shouldn’t live like *illegal* aliens, afraid of what the natives will do to us if they find out we’re different. We should be out there sharing our *culture* … the culture of Christ, the culture of the Kingdom!

Okay … how? Well, fortunately for us, *how* to be in Christ is the subject of the first three chapters of Ephesians. And let me just say, if you will expose yourself to the light of God’s truth contained there, you will be able to see farther than ever before. It’s not just about doing more good things and avoiding bad things. Let me ask you an important question: Do you really know who you are in Christ? … How do you see yourself as a Christian? … Do you see yourself as powerful? Or do you see yourself as ordinary? … Do you understand the true extent of what it means to have the Son of God living inside of you? … Are you enduring religion or enjoying a relationship? Do you hold your head up high *because* of your relationship to Christ, or are you sometimes embarrassed? Do see yourself in rags or in riches?   
 In the first six verses of Ephesians, we discover at least three characteristics of who are in Christ – but remember these are the tip of the iceberg.   
 First, in Christ we are ***Significant***. We are significant because we are saints! As Paul opens this letter to the church, he addresses it to the "saints." The Greek word here - *hagioi* - literally means “holy ones.” Paul is making a huge statement; as God’s holy ones, we are the ones who have been set apart by the person and work of Christ. The church is the most precious assembly on earth since Christ purchased it with his own blood. Don’t be misled by the mistaken idea that sainthood is something which can only be conferred upon certain dead people by some ecclesiastical body. According to God’s Word, all believers are already saints. From God’s perspective, we are saints, not because of who men say we are, but because of what Christ did for us.

He gives us His life in exchange for ours. He becomes our life. We live by His life. He is in us, and we are in Him. Now we live from this new level of life. When God looks at us, He sees us in Christ. And that’s how we should see ourselves – that is where we get our Jesus-shaped identity. One scholar wrote that the heart of Paul’s religion is union with Christ. ***164*** times we find the expressions “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” or “in Him” in Paul’s letters. This union with Christ is stressed more by Paul than any other doctrine - more than justification, than sanctification or even reconciliation. That should tell us something.  
 Unless we know our true position in Christ, we will never begin to live from that position.   
In Colossians 3:1-4 our position is described, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, and not on the things that are on earth. *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. When Christ, *who is our life*, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Our position is as those who are "hidden with Christ in God."

So we find right here in the introductions to the book of Ephesians that we are ***significant*** because of our status before God as a result of Jesus’ work. But we learn much more from this letter written by Paul. We also learn that…  
 In Christ we are ***Sufficient***. God has given us sufficiency in Christ (v. 3). God has not just given us spiritual blessing; he has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. In Him, we are made heirs to every promise, and guaranteed that they will come to pass. We have constant fellowship with God in Christ. We are free from condemnation in Christ. We are permanently connected to the love of God in Christ. Our justification and sanctification are found in Christ. In fact, in Him we become the righteousness of God. We are sealed in Him permanently securing our glorification. Our hope, joy, refreshing, and encouragement are found in Christ. We can triumph over every situation, every enemy, and every circumstance in Christ. We have been brought near to God in Christ. We *find* forgiveness, and *grant* forgiveness in Christ. We stand in strength, boldness, confidence, and protection in Christ. All our needs will be supplied in Christ; in fact, we are enriched by him … We are completed in Christ. If you do not know this truth, you will never walk in it. In Christ, we have sufficiency, because we have every spiritual blessing in him.

Finally, in Christ We Are ***Secure***.In verse 4 we are told that God chose us in Christ. In Jer. 1:5 tells us that God knew us before he formed us in the womb. This choosing by God is called election – he elected us to the position of being his children. We are secure because we have been predestined to be adopted children through Christ – that’s straight from v. 5 - the Greek word there is *proorisas* and it can be translated as foreordained or more literally as “marked out beforehand.”  
 It is simply another way to express the fact that God’s plan for His people is from eternity. The word adoption here is a Roman concept and actually not Jewish, and Paul uses it well to indicate that an adopted son has his position by grace and not by right. Some of you may know the little acrostic defining grace as "God’s riches at Christ’s expense." That’s not a bad definition. In Christ we can learn to rest in our relationship to Him. In Christ we are secure, because we are in the Beloved, we are truly “in Christ.”  
 What a powerful passage! In Christ we are significant. In Christ we are sufficient. In Christ we are secure. We are saints – set-apart-ones - so learn to realize what you have been set-apart for. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing, so learn to rely on your resources. You are accepted in the Beloved, so learn to rest in your relationship. We must remember who we are. The *center* of the Christian life is being in Christ. God is most glorified when we are in Christ, and others see Christ in us. We must not believe society’s definition of who we are, but God’s definition… And we must live out his definition of who we are. Because we have been brought into the fullness of God’s purposes in Christ, we are of great value and worth. We have access to the greatest resource ever. We are made alive Christ.

Let me close with a story. In 2008, I was fortunate enough to visit Edinburgh, Scotland, and while I was there I saw a statue of a dog with the inscription - “The Greyfriar’s Bobby.” Here’s the story behind that statue. In 1858, a man named John Gray was buried in old Greyfriars Churchyard, in Edinburgh. His grave, leveled by the hand of time, and unmarked by any stone, became scarcely discernible. But, although no *human* interest seemed to attach to it, there was one who continued to witness to Gray’s worth.   
 The sacred spot was not wholly disregarded and forgotten; for *fourteen years* the dead man’s faithful dog kept constant watch and guard over the grave until his own death in 1872. The old curator of the burial-ground, remembers Gray’s funeral, and the dog, a Skye terrier called "Bobby." At the funeral, Bobby was the most conspicuous of the mourners. The grave was closed in as usual, and next morning "Bobby", was found, lying on the newly-made mound.  
 This was an innovation the curator could not permit, for there was an order at the gate stating in the most intelligible characters that dogs were not permitted. "Bobby" was accordingly driven out; but next morning he was there again, and for the second time was discharged. The third morning was cold and wet, and when the old man saw the faithful animal, in spite of all chastisement, still lying shivering on the grave, he took pity on him, and gave him some food. This recognition of his devotion gave "Bobby" the right to make the churchyard his home; and from that time until his own death he never spent a night away from his master’s tomb.  
 Often in bad weather, attempts were made to keep him within doors, but by dismal howls he succeeded in making it known that this interference was not agreeable to him, and he was always allowed to have his way. At almost any time during the day he could be seen in or about the churchyard, and no matter how rough the night, nothing could induce him to forsake that hallowed spot, whose identity he so faithfully preserved.   
 We too are called to faithfully preserve an identity – Christ’s identity in ourselves – and to display it each and every day for the rest of our lives, so that others may also find a Jesus-shaped identity – to the glory of God. Amen.