

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Romans 6:1-11  
July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

It's true that today people use the word "identify" a little differently than they did a couple of decades ago. Usually, today, the word "self" goes with "identify" – namely how a person "self-identifies". So, today, we hear more talk about what people "identify with" or "as" rather than what they were made to be.

I guess you could say that in today's world, what you are made to be has become less important than how you feel like you should have been made to be. And so, like so many other ways that people fall into sin, we take the seat of God and proclaim that the way we feel is more important than what God made. This is difficult because real people have real struggles with identity. Yet at the same time, while struggles are real and love for all people must be first and foremost, we still are not allowed to take upon ourselves God's vocation as creator and designer. Also, the identity we desire to have apart from God's given identity is a first commandment issue. So, whether we are talking about identity regarding transgender issues, or if we are talking about a desired different identity with another women, for men who already have a wife – or identity with another man with a woman who already has a husband – we attempt to sit in the seat of God and take His good order of identity – who we really are – away from Him.

Now, it's true that what is making headlines today is the issue of transgenderism – what I feel is more important than what God has made me to be. However, all of us struggle with identity in one way or another – that's what the sinful flesh likes to do... take what God has made and change it to fit our own will and desire. This is always a first commandment issue – have no other Gods (even if that God is you) besides me. So, we thank the Lord when God breathes out His divine words as He does in the Epistle text for today. In other words, our identity is not made up in our head or our heart – it is a gift of God.

*"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* Beloved, this is true identity all rolled up into perfect imagery given to us in Romans Chapter six. We identify with Christ in this way... when we were baptized, we were baptized into Christ's death – He in us and we in Him. When we were baptized we were buried with Christ. When we were baptized we were raised with Christ from the dead by the glory of the Father. When we were baptized, we were given the identity of those who have been given by God to walk in the newness of life. And that is how we walk. This is the greatest identity that any person could ever have... To be identified as one who is in Christ, and Christ in us.

I loved it when I was identified with others... especially with those I had great respect for. For instance, I loved when others would identify me with my parents. They would say, that I look like my mom or my dad... or that I would act in a certain way that reminded them of my parents (hopefully in a good way). When I was a kid, people would say, "you can hit that baseball like your father." Which made me proud because my dad actually was a good enough baseball player to play professionally. Or, "you have a loud voice and you sing like your mother." Which made me proud because now, it's good to be a loud mouthed preacher I suppose.

I love it when my kids are identified with Andrea or me. I love it when people say that my boys remind them of me. I love it when people can see a family resemblance and when their mannerisms look like ours.

And just the same, I love it when God's people, especially the people of this congregation, remind me, but especially our community, our extended families, and the rest of the world of how we identify with Christ. We as Christians are apply named because we "put on" Christ each day of our lives and live for Him.

What we don't like – and what we don't want – is when we are identified with all the bad things. I'm not talking about stuff like, "Hey, you are bald just like your dad." No, that shouldn't be the thing that bothers us. I mean, I save a lot of money on haircuts and hair care products. No, what I mean is, the identifiable bad things of the people we resemble... the way they act hatefully toward others, the way they may be abusive and self-serving.

The same with our children... We may dislike the way they resemble the bad things about us. A pastor friend of mine once said, "I both love and hate the way my kids resemble me. They resemble both all my good qualities and my bad qualities." And yes, at times, we are not good examples for those who watch us closely. And that should be lesson for all of us to keep in mind. So identity in this sense is negative.

But it is never in the negative with Baptism. Even when we are talking about death in baptism. And yes, death happens in baptism. We die to sin. The Lord kills sin in baptism. This doesn't mean that we are no longer sinners or that because we are baptized, we will sin no more. No, our sinful human nature remains. But baptism does, "*work forgiveness of sins, rescues us from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe this...*" For this reason, baptism indicates "*that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires.*" This means that each day of our Christian lives we are to identify with our baptism – we identify with Christ who died – and we with Him – who was buried, we with Him – who was raised to life – we with Him, who lives life in newness, forgiveness, washed clean – we with Him. I hope you see this picture.

So, beloved, live life each day in your baptism. In other words, identify with Jesus – us in Him and He in us. Each day in prayer treasure in your heart the fact that God has intimately made you his own in this way? How does a little water do this? Certainly "*not just plain water, but water included in God's command and combined with God's word.*" Who you are means something. What God has granted to you and called you, means something. It means everything.

God-identity is given to us in baptism. That is always more important than self-proclaimed or even "self-felt" self-identity. And while the world will always proclaim that "who we are" is the most important part of life – the Word of the Lord begs to differ. No, rather, WHOSE you are the most important. This is "God-identity" – the Lord calling you into Himself... death, burial, resurrection, and new life. It's who and whose you are – created by God – loved by Him and redeemed undeservingly. Praise God that He desires to identify with sinners. Because now, we identify as who are we in Him – cleansed, forgiven and saved. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.