

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA August 14, 2016

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:16-21

## Identity Crisis

Hymns: 280 – 457 – 541 – 537

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:16-21

The enemy lurks and every one of us is more vulnerable than we would imagine. After something far more valuable than your possessions; this enemy wants to be you; this enemy wants to take your identity.

Identity theft is, far and away, the most prevalent crime in the United States, and the numbers continue to rise even as awareness and prevention attempts increase. Last year \$15 billion was stolen from 13.1 million people. In the past six years, identity thieves have stolen a total of \$112 billion from over 50 million people! And for us living in Washington, we are particularly at risk having the second highest number

of cases. For every 100,000 people living in our state, 154 have reported their identity being stolen.

Your identity is at risk. And the ease of falling prey to these thieves is high. Click on the wrong email link; leave a credit card in the wrong place; fail to shred one of those hundreds of applications that come in the mail; and there is someone waiting to pounce.

Besides the financial loss that often occurs, the road to recovering a stolen identity can often be long and tedious.

It's no wonder that identity theft prevention companies seem to be everywhere, making sure that you know just how vulnerable you are without them. Individuals spend hundreds, even thousands of dollars per year to guard themselves from this threat. And for good reason: Your identity is important!

As we look to God's Word today, we are going to be alerted to the fact that it isn't just cyber criminals looking to open a credit card in your name that are after your identity. Satan is after your identity as well – he's after your spiritual identity – and his attack is far more dangerous than the criminal trying to get his hands on your Social Security number.

Identity, in our world today, has become increasingly more important. The ways in which people view us; the associations they make when they think about us are important to us. And thanks to social media, in particular, we show ourselves to multitudes of people every day. And what we show to the world becomes our identity.

Just think for a moment of all the ways in which a person might find their identity in the world:

- A person might feel that they are most identified by their sexuality or their gender.
- Or a person can find their identity in what they do for a living – where they work, how much they make, what they sell.
- Identity can be defined by the country a person hails from or the political party with which they are aligned.
- It can be the fandom of a local football team that gives a person their sense of identity.

- A person can even find their identity in their family and the accomplishments of those who go before or in the children or grandchildren who come after.

As people look at your life, as they view your profile, what would be your identity; what is it in your life that defines you?

It was while watching the Olympics this week that I was stirred to think about identity and what that means for us as Christians living in this world.

When you think about Olympic athletes, you are thinking about people whose identities would seem to be pretty straightforward. Typically, these athletes find their identity in the country which they represent and the sport in which they have risen to the highest level of performance. How different it was as two American divers, David Boudia and Steele Johnson, were interviewed on NBC after their silver medal-winning performance in synchronized diving. Perhaps some of you have seen the video; if not, I'd encourage you to give it a look when you get home, but here is what they said about identity; Boudia first: *"It's just an identity crisis. When my mind is on this [diving], and I'm thinking I'm defined by this, then my mind goes crazy. But we both know that our identity is in Christ, and we're thankful for this opportunity to be able to dive in front of Brazil and in front of the United States. It's been an absolutely thrilling moment for us."* Johnson then added, *"The way David just described it was flawless — the fact that I was going into this event knowing that my identity is rooted in Christ and not what the result of this competition is just gave me peace ... and it let me enjoy the contest. If something didn't go great, I could still find joy."*

Most would assume as they watched them on TV that these two athletes would find their identity in their sport and the country for which they compete. Wherever they go for the rest of their lives, they will probably be introduced as "Silver-medal winning US Olympic divers." And yet they made it clear to the world as they spoke that this was not what defined them; this was not who they wanted to be known as. Where would they get such a notion? Listen to these

words from 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, ***"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

If we are being honest, I believe every one of us struggles through an identity crisis in our own lives. How often don't we fail to heed those opening words from Paul and instead build our identity from an entirely worldly point of view. How often don't we hope that others will view us through that lens as well. It's why we so eagerly point to our accomplishments and successes. It's why we take so much pride in the work that we are doing or the product we are selling. It's why we beam when people praise our family or "like" something we have done. It's why we can't wait to put on our Seahawks blue or our green and gold. Our identity is so often tightly attached to this world.

When we allow our identity to be formed from this worldly point of view, the reality is that our identity has been stolen from us. We have fallen prey to Satan's thieving work! He has taken what is most important to us and replaced it with a false sense of worth, accomplishment and identity.

And no matter how good and satisfying it might feel to have the world approve of who and what we are, the end result is always the same when our identity is formed from this worldly point of view. How mistaken, how disappointing, how unfulfilling it will end up being. The way of the world always leads us to those results.

How blessed, then, that Christ desires to shift our focus from a worldly point of view to a

heavenly one; from a physical perspective to a spiritual one.

And through the words of Scripture like those we find in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded that our identity is in Christ! Paul writes, ***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."*** Christ has given us a new identity; and Paul explains that it isn't formed by what we do, because what we do is never good enough. Instead, our identity comes from God, and it is founded in the work that Christ did for us.

Paul here refers to it as the work of reconciliation. There was a point in every one of our lives when our identity was that we were enemies of God. It was our sins that defined us and made us unworthy and incapable of having a relationship with God. But Jesus came to change our identity— ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** He took us from sinners on the path to hell to saints who can look forward to the joys of heaven. Our identity in Christ is that we are the righteousness of God. And because of that work, our identity is sealed. We are God's children, who know his love and who live in his forgiveness, who have had their lives and eternities changed.

And that identity that we have in Christ impacts what we will strive to show the world when they look at us. Paul says that those who have their identity in Christ and his work are focused on showing the world something besides themselves. Those who find their identity in Christ are "Christ's ambassadors."

When people see us, when they view our profile, when they speak to us, our goal is that they don't see us at all. We don't live to shine the light on ourselves so that people identify us by who we are and what we do. Instead, when people look at us, we strive to always show Christ. Our desire is that people might always see the life-changing impact that Christ and he alone can make in lives.

People desire to have an identity, and many are stuck in an identity crisis. As Christians, we don't have to work to be anything else to the world other than what Christ has made us. We

have an identity that is truly unique! And it is no wonder that Satan wants to take it from us. Rejoice in the identity that you have been given in Christ. Protect the identity you have been given in Christ. Make known the identity you have been given in Christ. Amen.