

“Proof of Identity”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron
July 18, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – July 18, 2021

“The church’s one foundation” #479 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 2, 5

(Words adapted for consistency with the Book of Praise)

V. 1 The Church's one foundation

Is Jesus Christ our Lord
We are His new creation
By water and the Word
From heav'n He came and sought us
That we might ever be
His living servant people
By His own death set free

V. 2 Elect from every nation

Yet one o'er all the earth
Our charter of salvation
One Lord one faith one birth
One holy name professing
And at one table fed
To one hope we are pressing
By Christ’s own Spirit led

V. 5 We now on earth have union

With God the Three in One
And share through faith communion
With those whose rest is won
O happy ones and holy
Lord give us grace that we
Like them the meek and lowly
On high may dwell with Thee

Samuel John Stone / Samuel Sebastian Wesley

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“I heard the voice of Jesus say” #671 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

V. 1 I heard the voice of Jesus say

Come unto Me and rest

Lay down thou weary one

Lay down thy head upon My breast

I came to Jesus as I was

Weary and worn and sad

I found in Him a resting place

And He has made me glad

V. 2 I heard the voice of Jesus say

Behold I freely give

The living water thirsty one

Stoop down and drink and live

I came to Jesus and I drank

Of that life giving stream

My thirst was quenched my soul revived

And now I live in Him

V. 1 I heard the voice of Jesus say

I am this dark world's Light

Look unto Me thy morn shall rise

And all thy day be bright

I looked to Jesus and I found

In Him my Star my Sun

And in that light of life I'll walk

Till travelling days are done

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Psalm 23 “The Lord's my Shepherd” #11 in the Book of Praise

V. 1 The Lord's my Shepherd I'll not want

He makes me down to lie

In pastures green He leadeth me

The quiet waters by

V. 2 My soul He doth restore again

And me to walk doth make

Within the paths of righteousness

E'en for His own name's sake

V. 3 Yea though I walk in death's dark vale
Yet will I fear no ill
For Thou art with me and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still

V. 4 My table Thou hast furnish-ed
In presence of my foes
My head Thou dost with oil anoint
And my cup overflows

V. 5 Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling place shall be

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“In Christ there is no east or west” #480 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

V. 1 In Christ there is no east or west
In Him no south or north
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth

V. 2 In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find
His service is the golden cord
Close binding humankind

Join hands companions in the faith
What e'er your race may be
Who loves and serves the living God
Is surely kin to me

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Closing Chorus “Go now in peace”

Go now in peace
Never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of every day
Go now in faith steadfast strong and true
Know he will guide you in all you do

Go now in love
 And show you believe
 Reach out to others so all the world can see
 God will be there watching from above
 Go now in peace in faith & in love.
 Amen Amen Amen

Don Besig & Nancy Price, Harold Flammer Music 1988,1989

Scripture Texts: Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's no secret that I have enjoyed being a part of the community life team at Canada Youth events over the past several years. Canada Youth brings young people and leaders together from across the country, for worship, study, fun, friendship and engaging with Christian community as we grow in our relationship with God through Christ. The people involved in the leadership end of things form a bond with each other that I truly appreciate. I have met so many wonderfully compassionate, funny, and faith-filled people throughout the years. I usually serve as a residence dean, kind of like camp mom, although one year I did serve as a chaplain for the event. It is an exhausting, exhilarating, energy-filled week and I always come back from it with new resources and insights that I can then share within my own ministry.

Worship at Canada Youth is like nothing we see in a "normal" Sunday morning service in the sanctuary. It is geared toward young people, of course, but doesn't throw out tradition for hype. It is planned carefully and with integrity, and I always appreciate the messages and atmosphere. I wish you could all hear when all those young voices join in the Lord's Prayer or one of the great hymns of the church, as well as contemporary music. Each year there is a song that becomes kind of a theme song for the week. The Lorica is one I brought home to St. Columba several years ago, and we still love it. A more recent experience had us singing a song called "Greater," recorded by the popular Christian band, Mercy Me. This is the same band that gave us the song "I Can Only Imagine." "Greater" is one of those upbeat, toe-tapping, dance-worthy songs, but it is its message that really caught my attention, because it's about who we are when we are found in Christ.

Bring your tired and bring your shame
 Bring your guilt and bring your pain
 Don't you know that's not your name
 You will always be much more to me
 Every day I wrestle with the voices
 That keep telling me I'm not right
 But that's alright
 'Cause I hear a voice and He calls me redeemed
 When others say I'll never be enough
 And greater is the One living inside of me
 Than he who is living in the world
 Bring your doubts and bring your fears
 Bring your hurt and bring your tears
 There'll be no condemnation here
 You are holy righteous and redeemed
 Every time I fall
 There'll be those who will call me a mistake
 Well that's ok

'Cause I hear a voice and He calls me redeemed
 When others say I'll never be enough
 And greater is the One living inside of me
 Than he who is living in the world
 There'll be days I lose the battle
 Grace says that it doesn't matter
 'Cause the cross already won the war
 I am learning to run freely
 Understanding just how He sees me
 And it makes me love Him more and more
 'Cause I hear a voice and He calls me redeemed
 When others say I'll never be enough
 And greater is the One living inside of me
 Than he who is living in the world¹

You've often heard me say we need to know who and whose we are.
 We need to know we are children of God: special, loved, beautiful.
 We are disciples of Jesus: eager, devoted, loving.
 We are sisters and brothers: supportive, challenging, connected.
 That's who we are.
 We belong to God.
 That's whose we are.
 This is our identity – who and whose we are.

But how can we show others, show the world, who and whose we are? What is our proof of identity? In the reading from Ephesians we are reminded of the proof of circumcision. But what about those to whom the apostle was writing? What about those who had not received such a physical mark to prove who they are? Their mark isn't a physical one. Theirs is spiritual.

The Gentiles who had become believers were identified by the community in which they worshipped, studied, served, and lived. They were identified by their behaviour, by their practices.

I recently conducted a funeral service for a woman whose children described her as having left a legacy of faith. They said people knew her love for Jesus by the way she loved and treated others. She was the witness that brought them to faith in Christ. She was the example of faithfulness that shaped their own relationship with the Lord. Her proof of identity, a disciple of Jesus, was not a business card or special uniform. It was her life, her heart, her way of loving

¹ Barry Graul | Bart Millard | Ben Glover | David Garcia | Mike Scheuchzer | Nathan Cochran | Robby Shaffer
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others with the love of Christ. We are identified as children of God and disciples of the living Jesus by living as children of God and disciples of the living Jesus.

Sometimes people do wear a physical indication of their identity as a Christian believer. Some will have a cross, a dove, or some other representation of their faith created as a tattoo. Some will wear a special necklace or bracelet. My husband has some great t-shirts that clearly identify him as a believer. People will decorate their homes at Christmas with signs and nativity scenes that attempt to keep people focused on the birth of Christ. None of these things, however beautiful and meaningful they may be, actually identifies us as Christian believers. What identifies us may not even be noticeable to other people, because what marks us as Christians lies in our hearts. It is found in our relationship with God through Christ that plays out in our daily lives and treatment of other people, and our involvement in the community of faith.

In the Gospel text today we read a story about Jesus trying to give his disciples a break, some time to rest and be renewed. He tries to get them away from the crowd, but they are recognized and the crowd follows them. The disciples are recognized by their relationship with Jesus, by their closeness to him. They are identified as Jesus' disciples because the people know who Jesus is, and by his association with his friends, they are recognized through him. Rather than telling, and the ministry they shared with him had exhausted them to the point he told them to go and rest, to look after themselves. So, their identity rests in him, and therefore they are told to go and rest with him.

A friend sent me an article from the PCUSA about what is being called "The Great Resignation." Apparently there has been, in the US, a surge in people leaving their jobs for other pursuits as we (hopefully) move into a post-pandemic world. Perhaps they've re-evaluated what they want to be doing. Perhaps they are burnt out. Perhaps they are simply needing a change. The woman who wrote the article reflects on the fact that this surge isn't restricted to the business world. It is happening in the church too. She writes, "In church circles, our Great Resignation refers to deacons and elders resigning after a tumultuous and exhausting year of service, and pastors leaving not just their current call, but ministry altogether. This pandemic year has not only burned them out, but disillusioned them to ministry... Exhausted pastors often feel like they're not serving anyone well, including themselves."²

A common human experience is the feeling of being tired, not just sleepy, but weary – emotionally, physically, spiritually. Sometimes it all just seems too much and we wish we could step out of reality for a while. Most of us can find a way to do that, but sometimes we don't even notice how tired we are. Sometimes we need someone else to point it out. A few years ago, a trusted colleague pointed it out to me, after an extended time of turmoil in my personal and professional life. There were warning signs all over the place, but I couldn't see them. So he, with honesty and grace, made me aware. The result was the gift of some time away from work, just a couple of weeks, but time to simply rest. I think I slept through most of it. And to this day, I am so grateful for that honest colleague. He saw it. He got it. He identified it. It worked. I

² <https://pres-outlook.org/category/ministry-resources/looking-into-the-lectionary/>

believe, in his actions toward me, God was pointing out what I didn't know I needed. That colleague could be identified as a disciple of Jesus by imitating Jesus in his care for another.

The minister who wrote the article I was sent this week also wrote, "In this week's lectionary passage from Mark, Jesus shows his disciples, weary from all the ministry they had been doing in and around Galilee, that he gets it: 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' Are there any words in all of Scripture more welcome to weary disciples? You mean we get to take a break? We get to go away and not talk to anyone? We get to be alone, take naps, read a book just for fun? Maybe this is just my introvert's idea of paradise. Maybe your idea of rest is a packed dance party, or a crowded concert where you can let loose and just be yourself. But the point is the same: Jesus gives us permission to take care of ourselves... Jesus' message isn't just for disciples or ministry leaders, but for all those who need a break but feel obligated not to take one: owners of small businesses, teachers, doctors and nurses, parents of small children — those little, needy ones who know no "deserted place" boundaries... We probably all struggle with leaving our responsibilities behind. Guilt plagues parents desperate for alone time. Busy professionals fear falling behind and never being able to catch back up. And what if we step away and realize we're not as needed as we thought we were? What, then, will fill our need for purpose?"³

I could also ask, what then will identify us as parents, business leaders, church leaders, etc. What if the church doesn't fall apart because I'm not there, clergy may honestly ask ourselves. I hope it doesn't, because the church ought not live and die on my leadership. It lives because Christ's Spirit breathes life into it and gives us a mission to fulfill. The church is identified as the body of Christ in the world, and no one else. Leaders – clergy or not – come and go. The church stands as a community known in Jesus Christ.

Bring your tired and bring your shame

Bring your guilt and bring your pain

Don't you know that's not your name

You will always be much more to me

Do you people know you as a child of God, redeemed through Christ, living as a disciple of Jesus in the world?

Do you know yourself in this way? I hope so.

When we give our hearts to Jesus, and our lives into his hands,

When we look to him and follow him,

We are his disciples.

We are his people.

We are the family of God as found in Christ.

We are called holy, righteous, and redeemed by the one who names us as his own.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

³ Ibid.