

+ Galatians 3:23-29 + You Are Sons of God in Christ + 17th Sunday after Pentecost + 5 October 2014 +

Who are you? A pretty basic question that usually gets a pretty basic answer, right? “I’m (fill in your name)”, but is that really who you are? Just a name? So who are you? Some might say that you are where you come from. No doubt the place and the social setting where you grew up has an impact on who you are, but is your identity really defined by where you came from or by your family’s economic or social status as you grew up?

Others might say that your family defines who you are—who your parents are or your siblings or your spouse or your kids. Yes, I am the son of Pastor Alan and Carolyn Gumm. I am the husband of Lisa and the father of Adelaide, Matthias, Clara, and now Muriel, but is that who I am? Is your identity defined by your family or your friends? Is it defined by where you work or if you’re not working or if you’re retired? Is it defined by how much or how little money and stuff you have? Is any of that really who you are?

So who are you? Does your identity change as you pass through one set of doors into one building or out the doors of another? Is your identity here different than what it is at home and different yet again at work or at school or in your community? When you respond to that question, “Who are you?”, surely your response is more than just another faceless name in the crowd.

This morning the Apostle Paul has something to say about your identity. I know, 2,000 years ago was a really long time ago, but Paul was writing to believers just like you and me and what he had to say about their identity is just as relevant for your identity and mine today.

You see, you and I once had a very different identity—and it wasn’t good. You were in prison—and so was I. Not necessarily a physical jail cell, but every one of us was a captive, a prisoner held in the custody of God’s holy Law. Paul tells us, **“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”**

Now why would we be prisoners of God’s holy Law? Well, like any criminal who has broken the law, you and I have disobeyed God’s holy Law in our thoughts, our words, and our actions. You and I have failed to keep the commands of that Law perfectly. Think back to selfish actions, hurtful words, loveless thoughts, or those times when you’ve failed to do what is right. Recall those times when you thought you could earn God’s favor. The long list of charges against us requires that we be held in custody for trial before the holy God and requires that we be condemned for those sins.

By nature, you were a prisoner, a captive, a death row inmate—and the Lord had put you in the custody of his condemning Law, but there was a reason for that. You see, even though the Law imprisoned you and directed you where you did not naturally want to go, the Lord in his grace used that Law to prepare you to hear his Gospel. He used the Law to cause you to despair of yourself realizing that on your own, there was no possibility that you could rescue yourself, let alone change your identity for the good.

The Law became your guardian to keep you in line because before God you had no identity, no status—except as a condemned prisoner. Yet the Lord used that Law to serve the Gospel—**“to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”** Held captive in the prison of sin and the custody of God’s holy Law, the holy God through his Gospel declares you “not guilty”, innocent, righteous in his sight—purely out of his undeserved love. Rather than allow you to suffer the punishment that your sins deserve, Jesus took your punishment on himself. You couldn’t possibly accomplish that, only Jesus Christ who did it all to give you a new identity free from the imprisonment of sin and the custody of the Law. That immeasurable grace is yours **“through faith in Christ Jesus”**, and your identity is changed forever.

You see, the Lord didn’t just rehabilitate you like they try to do to criminals in a prison. No, he chose to adopt you—to not just make you a servant in his household, but to make you a bona fide member of the family. **“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”** Who we were has been transformed into who we have become without exception. We now have the full rights and privileges and inheritance that belong to **“sons of God”**. All of that belongs to us **“through faith in Christ Jesus”**, but wait!

Why would Paul say, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...”**? Did he misspeak? Did he forget that ladies would hear and read his letter? Now Scripture demonstrates that St. Paul had the highest regard for women, especially those who followed Christ. So he wasn’t ignoring them. He didn’t misspeak either. So what’s Paul trying to say to all of us?

Here Paul is speaking of our status, our identity before God. In the very next verse he speaks of how we received this new identity. **“...For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Through water and the Word, we became heirs of eternal life. We became **“sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”**—every one of us.

Paul talked about this when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (5:21) When you were baptized, the Lord in his grace covered the tattered, filthy rags of your sins that shamefully covered your body and clothed you with the full, holy robe of Jesus and his righteousness. In Holy Baptism, Jesus became your garment, your clothing, much like the white robe infants often wear when they are baptized.

That means God now sees you differently. Instead of seeing what you did or failed to do, he sees the holy life, the perfect obedience of his Son Jesus Christ. He sees the innocent blood and perfect sacrifice from the cross. He sees you now as a rightful heir to the inheritance of heaven.

Paul explains further, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”** I doubt that any of us can trace our roots all the way back to the Old Testament patriarch Abraham. For Paul’s readers of Jewish descent, that was a mark of pride, but Paul wanted them and us to realize that belonging to Christ makes you a true descendant of Abraham—that great hero of faith who trusted that God had the power to keep his promises. We are now his descendants by faith in the Savior whom Abraham longed to see. So now **“if you belong to Christ, then you are...heirs according to the promise.”** By faith in Jesus, heaven and eternal life and eternal rest are yours, but what about right now?

Consider what else the Apostle tells us, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** If you have that special status, that special identity as a **“son of God through faith in Christ Jesus”**, then you are also part of something bigger, part of something where our earthly distinctions don’t matter in the proper sense.

You are an heir of the King of kings standing before the holy God through faith in Christ Jesus. Standing next to you is a fellow heir through faith in Christ Jesus. Before God, your cultural differences don’t matter. Before God, your social differences don’t matter. Before God, your family history differences don’t matter. Before God, your hometown or home country differences don’t matter. When it comes to your status, your identity **“through faith in Christ Jesus”**, not even your gender differences matter! Through faith in Christ, we are one in Christ—and that’s amazing because you will not be able to find such unity anywhere else in our world.

You have a new identity before God through faith in Christ Jesus, so how is that going to show itself in your life? How are you going to live as a **“son of God”**? How are you going to live as an heir of eternal life? How is that new identity in Christ going to impact your life at home, at work, at school, in the community, on the playground? How can you live as a **“son of God”** because the Son of God lived for you and gave you that new identity? How are you going to answer that age-old question—“Who are you?”

You’re not just another faceless sinner in the crowd defined by the whims of your sinful nature. You’re no longer a prisoner of the Law—forced to go where you were not naturally inclined to go. You are free. You are righteous in God’s sight. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. You are Abraham’s descendant by faith, and you are an heir **“according to the promise.”** That’s who you are. That’s your true identity. Through faith in Christ Jesus, that’s who you will be both here now and forever in the glories of heaven. So demonstrate that sonship every day in every aspect of your life, and rejoice, my friends, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”!** Amen.