

January 25, 2015

*I Corinthians 7:29-31: **“Live As You Are Called”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was a German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant Christianity. He did much to shape modern Christianity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Suffice it to say, he was *not* a confessional Lutheran. One day as an old man he was sitting alone on a city park bench. A policeman, thinking that he was a homeless person, came over and shook him and asked, "Who are you?" Schleiermacher sadly replied, "I wish I knew."

I am guessing that most of you have heard the phrase "identity crisis" before, and you probably have a fairly good idea of what it means. According to *psychology.about.com*, an identity crisis "is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself" and it can occur repeatedly in a persons life during times of great change. Here's a phrase you probably haven't heard of: "identity achievement." Identity achievement occurs when "an individual has gone through an exploration of different identities and made a commitment to one." Perhaps you hardly hear of identity achievement because it seems that most people are in a constant state of identity crisis!

Nevertheless, I would suggest to you that there are many Christians who really don't know who they are, or they have such a weak understanding of what it means to be a child of God that they are easily talked out of it; especially, when their sinful desires takes over. Identity crisis is described in the book of James, "if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (James 1:22-25)."

Who are we? The answer begins with our Baptism. All those who have been baptized have been given a new identity in the name of God. Having received the benefits of the washing away of our sins through faith, we know who we are. We are the children of God; members of the body of Christ, the bride, and spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ who even love their enemies. Our identity is clear, and it lasts for as long as faith remains. In Baptism, the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the only who saves us - has been given to us.

And what is that name? The Father gave his one and only Son. In the Holy Spirit we have participated in death and resurrection. We live that death and resurrection in confession and absolution, every day whenever sinful desires die in us and a new person lives in forgiveness. In the Gospel of John, we learn that the name of God is everything revealed about him in the Bible, the letter that kills and the Spirit that gives life, even attached to the water of Baptism as a mark of identity, and an identity that is connected to teaching and observing all things. Discipleship is described in this way: ". . . make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20)."

And he is with us always, unless we chose to extinguish our faith and forget what we look like. May we never deny his water mark on us and cut ourselves off from his teaching. I don't know if you have ever noticed, but in many of his epistles Paul repeatedly says that we are "in Christ." Indeed, he is with us always. Whether it is through the preaching of the law and gospel, being Baptized and living our Baptisms where sin dies and the new person lives, or receiving his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, we are participating in his death and resurrection. He is in us, and we are in him. It says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but *Christ lives in me*. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Christ lives in me! That is quite an identity to have added to our sinful names. His name becomes the content of our name and the content of our character. It sharply focuses on who we really are. And it is very practical. The real strength to face the trials of life is to know and believe that we do not face them alone, but we face them with the one who has already faced them for us and has overcome. When we face temptations, having been marked with the cross in our Baptisms, we cannot conceive of doing such sins at that cross in the face of Jesus who suffered for us. Since we have been marked with the water of forgiveness, and as such, the name of Jesus has been connected to our name, the life that we live is not our own, but a life lived in and with Jesus and in accordance to his teaching.

In our epistle lesson for this morning, some of these things are discussed. The life we live now is a life lived in and with Jesus. Consequently, there is a change. Before our epistle lesson Paul makes a very important statement in verse 17: "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches (1 Corinthians 7:17)." The life assigned to us, that is our vocation, is either lived without Christ or with him in faith. If it is lived in faith and with Jesus, then our life is supposed to be a manifestation of him in good works for all to see. Thus Paul writes:

this is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

In this text, Paul is talking about the Christian who lives in the context of a world that is coming fast to an end. Whatever our vocation may be, whether we are father, mother, son, daughter, white collar or blue collar, pastor or flock, you name it, it is either blessed by faith or damned by unbelief. It is either a life lived in Jesus that bears witness to Jesus and a manifestation of him to others, or it is a life lived for self. Faith in Christ - the mark of his name - our identity in him - Christ in us - his action in and through us - is of first importance in this world that is passing away. Luther puts it in blunt terms when he comments on our epistle lesson:

This is a general teaching for all Christians, that they should treasure that eternal blessing which is theirs in the faith, despising this life so that they do not sink too deeply into it either with love and desire or suffering or boredom, but should rather behave like guests on earth,

using everything for a short time because of need and not for pleasure...he should only serve necessity and not be a slave to his lust and nurture his old Adam.

Now be careful that you don't misunderstand Paul or Luther. They are not so stupid as to think that there is no such thing as being thankful for the gifts that God gives in this life, nor are they promoting complete indifference to living in the world, nor are they saying that it's okay to neglect your spouse or anything like that. Rather, they are warning about having a divided heart, or an "identity crisis." Who are you - as you mourn, rejoice, buy goods, and live in marriage? Whatever you do, whatever is your vocation, whatever the life that the Lord has assigned to you, is to be lived in the context of a life in Jesus where life is manifest in us. We live in him and he lives in us. Luther writes:

This, therefore, is the tremendous glory with which the divine majesty adorns us, that he acts in such manner through us that he says that our word is his word, and our actions are his actions. So that you can actually say that the mouth of the godly teacher is the mouth of God, that the hand which you stretch out to ease the need of the brother is the hand of God.

That is heavy stuff to consider and it opens the door to much discussion, more than we can possibly do in this short sermon. But one thing is for certain, we should not be in an identity crises. Instead we should have identity achievement. The name of God is the content of our name. Christ is in us which leads to a life where everything is him living in and through us. It is a blessed and faithful life, but it is a life that bids us to die to ourselves and live a new life. Who are you? You are a Christian - marked with the identity of Jesus. Live As You Are Called!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott