



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for March 22, 2020**  
**“According to Luke: Identity”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Luke 22:66-71**

*At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.”*

*Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”*

*They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?”*

*He replied, “You say that I am.”*

*Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.” (Luke 22:66-71)*

### **Identity Is a Pretty Important Thing**

Identity is a pretty important thing. We spend a good portion of our lives trying to figure out who we are.

When it comes to technology, one of the worst things that can happen is for our identities to be stolen.

We shouldn't be surprised that companies like Life Lock are flourishing, while at the same time those who are adept at hacking our computers are getting more and more sophisticated.

Trying to clear things up—getting your identity back, if you will—is not all that easy.

Hold that thought, if you will.

### **“Who Am I?”**

*“Who am I?”* is one of the fundamental questions of life.

Our identities are tied up into so many things, like our jobs, our reputations, our families, our accomplishments.

Trying figure out who we are, is a whole life issue.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was a philosopher and theologian who lived way back in the early 1800's. As an old man, Schleiermacher was sitting alone on a park bench when a constable happened by. Thinking he was a vagrant, the officer asked, *“Who are you, anyway?”*

Upon which Schleiermacher replied, *"I wish I knew."*

We all can relate?

## **The Identity of Christ**

The notion of Christ's identity is a consistent theme in scripture.

At his birth the angel of the Lord says, *"Do not be afraid; I bring you good news of great joy for all the people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a **Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**"* (Luke 2:10-11)

Upon Christ's baptism *"a voice came from heaven and said, 'You are **my Son, the Beloved;** with you I am well-pleased.'" (Luke 3:22)*

At the Mount of Transfiguration a voice came from heaven and said, *"This is **my Son, my Chosen;** listen to him!"* (Luke 9:35)

Throughout the New Testament there are all sorts of names that attempt to identify who Jesus is.

How about these:

- *Son of God, Son of man, the Great Physician, prophet, priest, king, the Light of the World, the Door, the Vine, the Firstborn of Creation, the Bright and Morning star, the Alpha and the Omega."*
- Jesus was even been called, *"the Name above All Names."*

## **Who Do You Say That I Am?**

Jesus even tested the waters to get an idea about what others were thinking.

He asked his disciples, *"Who do people say that I am?"*

*"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."* (Luke 9:18-20)

Upon hearing their response Jesus then asked them this all-important question, *"But who do **you** say that I am?"*

It was then that Peter spoke up and said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Regardless of what others are saying, the question comes to you and me, *"Who do **you** say that I am?"*

How do you answer that question?

Martin Luther, the great reformer, once wrote, *"I care not whether he be Christ, but that he be Christ for you."*

## Jesus before the Sanhedrin

The notion of Christ's identity became front and center during his trial.

Upon his arrest Jesus met first with the High Priest and then the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was made up of seventy members—priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees—the whole gamut of Jewish religious leadership.

Their charge was to act on behalf of God in bringing about God's justice. It's ironic that when it came to Jesus those charged with acting justly, acted anything but justly.

The Sanhedrin and those they represented wanted to get rid of Jesus. Their minds had been made up for a long time.

All along they had tried to trip him up. They challenged Jesus about his views on the Sabbath, about eating with sinners and tax collectors, about Roman authority, about life after death.

Above all things, they pressed him about who he considered himself to be. In other words they were continually pressing him about his identity.

At his trial the Sanhedrin pressed Christ to admit that he was the Son of God. If he did that then they could charge him with blasphemy, which was a capital offense.

### ***You Say That I Am***

At his trial the stuff of Christ's identity was quick to come to the fore.

*"If you are the Christ, tell us,"* they said.

*"Even if I did,"* he responded, *"you wouldn't believe."*

Jesus did though assert that *"the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of the power of God."*

All along, Jesus was confident that he would emerge triumphant. He, never for a moment, believed that anyone would be able to thwart the purposes of God.

*"So you **are** the Son of God?"* they asked him, and with that he responded, *"**You say that I am.**"*

The Sanhedrin took that and ran with it. They were to content to twist, spin, entrap, and window dress whatever Jesus said to fit their purpose.

Even if Jesus came right out and said what they wanted him to say, they still wouldn't have believed. They simply wanted Jesus gone.

## Two Identities

I find there are two identities at play here.

- The first is the identity of Christ. He is the Son of God, after all, and it comes to us to believe that.

- The second is the identity, or shall I say the fallen identity, of all who wanted him dead.

Take the guards, for instance, the scripture records that they mocked and beat him. They heaped insults and bullied him to no end.

- Bullying is front and center these days. Bullies forget that everyone is a person of worth in God's sight. In a twisted, perverted way they make themselves feel good by making someone else feel bad.
- They're into destroying someone else's identity in order to assuage theirs.
- We need to do all we can to stop the bullying so prevalent in our culture today.

Whether it was the soldiers who mocked and beat Jesus or the selfish, misguided members of the Sanhedrin, they all had missed the mark of who God wanted them to be.

Their identities were far from God's original intent for their lives. In a word, they were exposed for who they had become. They were sinful in every way.

N. T. Wright asserts, *"All of this put Jesus on the cross—real sin, real folly, real rebellion."*

As the scripture says in Romans 3:23, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* you and I included.

### **We Too Miss the Mark**

We too miss the mark. Our identities are sullied as well.

Our identities are much too aligned with those things that just don't mesh with God and what he wants.

We are counted among the number of those who have lost their identity, if you will, an identity that has been God's design and desire since the very beginning.

Jesus came to change that, to restore our identities to where God has wanted them all along. And he makes that possible by what he does on the cross.

*"For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (II Corinthians 5:21)

### **Identity Restored**

It comes to us all. Sometimes we get so caught up in the things of this world that we forget who we are and whose we are.

- Our present circumstance with the Coronavirus is teaching us about what really is important and not just **what's** important, but **who's** important.

You've seen the movie the *The Lion King*.

Simba, the lion cub, is separated from all that reminds him of his identity. He is away from home and family. He forsakes his true identity as a lion, much less as The Lion King.

Enter Rafiki, Simba's baboon friend. Rafiki calls his lion friend back to his true identity.

Rafiki leads Simba to a great lake. Simba stares into the water and not only sees his face, but the face of his father.

Simba recognized his father within himself and in that moment was transformed.

For us, with the cross now looming, we see ourselves reflected not in the water of some lake, but in a hastily called trial.

We understand that we are not much different than those who participated in Christ's trial, those who had long since lost their identity to their selfish ways.

Whether it was the guards who mocked him or those who presided over his trial, they had all lost their way on account of their sinfulness.

In Christ though we see reflected who we might become.

We see reflected in him the very nature of God, the One who saw fit to offer his Son so that we might be called Children of God.

*"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."*  
(John 1:12-13)

This is our true identity.

The good news this Lenten Season in the midst of a steady stream of bad news is that in Christ our identities are restored.

What Jesus did on the cross makes that possible. Like with computers, trying to clear things up, restoring one's identity, if you will, is not easy.

Christ though paves the way for that to happen. Thanks be to God.