

Sermon Text: Romans 8:14-17

Sermon Theme: You Are God's Child

An individual reaches out their hand and asks, "And who are you?" To which you probably respond with your name. Nothing too exciting there, right? That's who you are. It's your identity. Then if you shared your last name, well now you've shared another part of your identity. That's the family that you belong to; you are connected in some shape or form to this other group of people. Some might base some generalizations of who you are with the last name you have. But your name and your relations are only a small part of your identity. An identity is an answer to that question of, "Who am I?" What makes up me? What makes me different from you? As we grow up we try to grow in this self-awareness of who we are, what are my likes and dislikes, how to react in this situation, how to live if that happens, and it all goes into a building labeled, "My Identity." But it's not always a very secure building. It begins to shake when a part of the foundation is pulled out or is no longer present. For instance, children move out the house and parents become "empty-nesters." If they based their identity on taking care of those kids, when the kids are gone, they struggle with what to do or how to live. Or, someone is no longer able to work or able to do the work they once knew and loved. Their identity was based on that job, and now that they are no longer able to do it, they are almost lost. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't know what my purpose is," they might say. One might have a picture of what their identity is supposed to be based on personal goals and life plans: married at this time, have this type of family, work this sort of job, life in this place, etc. But when those certain life goals or plans aren't reached, one is left wondering, "What now?" These are examples of what psychology calls an identity crisis which happens *when a person's sense of identity becomes insecure typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society* (Google "identity crisis"). It can make life a very hard struggle when you are not sure of who you are. It can feel like you are lost in life with no sense of direction or purpose.

In Romans 8, Paul is speaking to us about our identity. By the Word the Spirit has been poured out onto us and the Spirit lives within us through faith that God creates. Those who have the Spirit, have saving faith, and are then led by the Spirit. This does not mean that you should expect to receive visions from God. It doesn't mean that you will be given signs in nature to lead you down the right path of life. God normally does not choose to communicate this way with his people today, as we are told in Hebrews 1. Instead, he chooses a better method: God speaks to us through his Son who is the Word. So, we are led by the Spirit by reading and hearing God's Word.

Those who are led by the Spirit, Paul says, now are sons of God. The NIV 2011 editors chose to translate this as children of God instead of going with “sons of God.” But that takes away a little bit from the point that Paul is making in the original language. Paul isn’t being sexist, but in the culture of his day the son of the house was the one who received the inheritance. So Paul isn’t excluding women from this promise to be heirs of God. Instead he brings them in that they too are made sons of God and heirs of his gift. Those who are led by the Spirit, their identity is sons of God belonging to his family, belonging to God.

With this identity Paul explains in v.15, “*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery so that you are afraid again, but you received the Spirit of adoption.*” We see an example of this slavery to fear with Isaiah. Standing in the throne room of God with the sound of the voices of the angels, the doorposts and floor shook and the temple was filled with smoke, Isaiah said, “Woe to me! I am ruined!” He thought it was the end for him. This is the natural reaction of sinful man in the presence of the Holy Triune God. For all of a sinner’s bravado and saying how it’s going to do whatever it wants and doesn’t care what God or anyone else thinks, sinful mankind shakes in fear in the presence of God’s holiness.

And this is where we can have our identity crisis. It happens because we know God’s Law, what God expects, and it might scare us. If it didn’t scare you, you wouldn’t come up with excuses and reasons for why you did a sinful action. That’s a defense that we use to try and shield us from the reality of sin and its consequences. If we were not afraid of the reaction, we would be more forthcoming when we have done something wrong. Instead we try and hide it under the excuses or attempt to push off the responsibility to someone else.

This identity crisis might come from our struggle with the sin we have fallen into in the past and the difficulties face. After we have fallen into sin, the devil quickly points out, “A child of God wouldn’t have done that.” We try to do better next time, then fall again, and one might start to wonder maybe the devil might have a point, “A child of God wouldn’t still have problems with this, would they?” One might start to have an identity crisis thinking they had no choice but to commit that sin. After fighting and failing again and again, one may start to feel that’s just who I am—a sinner who always does those sinful things. Or, life doesn’t go the way we planned and difficulties loom in our faces, we are tempted to question and doubt, “Would a child of God have to deal with this? Am I getting paid back for something I did? Is God punishing me? Is my sin kicking me out of God’s family? Does God still want me?”

It may seem like we are slaves to that fear when we only do things because we are afraid of what is going to happen to me, how people are going to react and be upset,

how God would be mad at me. All of sudden the reason you don't want to or why you do something is because you don't want to make God angry. And so you live and act solely out of fear and obligation. Now it feels like you are just a slave who **has to do** God's will, or else! This is just another form of self-righteousness and trying to earn God's love. Really, it's Law-motivation. God's Law convicts the heart, scares one into action and might change it for a little bit. But if we only try to motivate with the Law, you are enslaving someone to the Law. A slave to the Law does not love God. Slaves eventually want to break free. The Law makes us angry with God and what he tells us to do because we see how we can't follow it perfectly.

But that's not your identity. That's not the spirit you received. The spirit you received is the spirit of adoption. You aren't a slave bent and forced to do God's Will. You aren't a slave burdened with the weight of the Law. You are freed. You have been legally and formally declared God's own child who is treated like his Son Jesus. He is not just the Lord Almighty, holy and perfect whom angels proclaim his praises. By that Spirit we are led to cry out, "*Abba, Father!*" Abba Father isn't calling God, "Daddy." This is speaking to your special intimate relationship with him. "Our Father who art in heaven," we pray. No ordinary man or woman who is born of the flesh could be so free with God. Realizing the seriousness of sin, no sinful man or woman would dare approach the holy God and call him Father, daring to ask him for anything. But the Spirit joins your spirit, works with you, and leads you in your Abba, Father-prayers to confirm and support this truth that you are God's child.

This is your special relationship now with the Triune God. And the Spirit continues to lead us and to work to strengthen that relationship. Again, he doesn't do this with visions and dreams. He leads you by working through the Word where God has revealed his will to us. He continues to work through the Sacraments where faith is created and strengthened. He works through that baptism that is still effective today where you live each day in God's grace as God's child. And because you are not slaves, you are free to live for him. He hasn't made you a robot that has their entire course exactly planned out without choices or decisions. No, you have been set free and God gives you the promise that he already knows the decisions you make and will work them for your good. Now, this doesn't give us an excuse to do whatever we want. No, we are God's children, and as God's children we want to do what pleases him. Not because we are afraid of him, but because we love him and we are thankful to him. We do it because we are his children. I think of a time when I asked a young child to do something for me. They didn't ask questions, they just did it for the sheer joy of being able to help. It was nothing big by any means, but when they accomplished the task they were so happy because they were able to do *something*. That's the mindset we want as God's children:

to do something, follow his will, not out of fear, obligation, expectation of return, but because you are his child.

Yes, we struggle with this. The life of a Christian is a constant battle drowning the old man of sin and resisting temptation and sin. There's the seemingly constant pushing down of sinful pride refocusing and adjusting misguided motivations. That's where the Spirit comes to lead you to follow God's will because you are God's child. He comes also to remind you that since you are God's child—his sons—you are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Yes, we suffer and struggle—Jesus did too. So we should expect the same to happen to us. Be comforted though because Jesus overcame that suffering, he defeated the struggle against sin, and as he shared our weaknesses so we share in his victories as well. By the waters of baptism and his Word he has touched you, washed you and says, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.” No need to feel guilty, there's nothing to accuse you of. All your sin in the past, all your sin in the future has been paid for, forgiven, and removed from you. You are born again a child of God.

As you are all too well aware, life isn't going to always be easy. But God uses it to teach us to turn from me, to stop basing our identities first on ourselves, our own expectations, our personal accomplishments, and to recognize that the most important identity is what you have in him. And this identity cannot be taken from you. Nothing can separate you from the love of God because the Father has adopted you and declares you to be his child confirmed by the Spirit. And because you are his child, you can look forward to being glorified with Christ. You have a home that is already in your name. You have a place that already belongs to you. You have eternal life through faith and are welcomed into God's kingdom.

Who are you? Place your confidence in what God declares you to be. Who are you? You are God's child. Amen.