

Text: Luke 5: 1-11

Title: An Identity Crisis

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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Tiger Woods made his apology to the public this weekend, which reminds me of the time Jesus and Moses were playing a round of golf. Jesus hits His ball into the sand trap & asks Moses hand me the 9 iron. Moses says Jesus you can't use a 9 iron the ball will go into the pond! Jesus says no, I saw Arnold Palmer do it, if Arnold Palmer can do it, I can do. So Jesus swings the 9 iron, splash right into the pond. Moses says I told you as he walks over to the pond parts it and retrieves the ball. Jesus says Moses hand me the 9 iron again. Moses flips C'mon Jesus you saw what happened last time the ball going right back into the pond. Jesus says no I saw Arnold Palmer use the 9 iron, If Arnold Palmer can do it--I can do it. Jesus swings--splash. Jesus says Mo I'll get this one so as he walks out onto the pond reaching down trying to find his ball, a passerby says hey who does that guy think he is Jesus Christ? Moses says no Arnold Palmer.

Obviously, Jesus is comfortable with who He is. However, my observation is many of us are not so comfortable with our identity. Questions like: Who am I? Why am I here? What's my purpose?

These are not merely questions asked by adolescents trying to figure what to do with their lives or issues young adults grapple with in the midst of their new careers and families...this is behind the quest of the midlife crises when people quit their jobs or leave the marriages hoping to rid themselves of the rut of an insipid life. Or the reflections of retirees as they look back on their lives and try to discern what to do with their time.

As people seek an identity, our culture offers endless options. Our youth are seduced by the latest fads of the counter culture. Adults are enticed by the American Dream, where the primary concern is am I happy? The cultural emphasis on our personal enjoyment means if you don't like who you are: get a new toy, try a different high, maybe a change in environment, or a different spouse. The insatiable preoccupation with the self--dismisses responsibility to others.

Unfortunately, Christians are not exempt from an Identity Crises. Some try to compete with the conspicuous consumption of society. Others torture themselves with guilt from past mistakes & define themselves as failures. Still others (equally unable to grasp the concept of grace) disdain others with scathing judgment--too boost their identity with elf righteousness. Many Christians neglect to eradicate sin from their lives and thus remain dominated by their vices. The tendency is to rationalize the conviction of sin--getting defensive, I'm not so bad. Yet the questions echo through our souls: Who am I? What's my purpose? Am I alright?

Christian let me clarify your identity: Christ purchased the rights to your life when He brought us salvation. We no longer live for ourselves but for Him. 1 Peter 2:9 You are a people for God's own possession...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you...

Moving to our text we find Jesus surrounded by a multitude so He gets into Peter's boat creating a pulpit in order to more effectively address the crowd. However, Jesus has an ulterior motive. Our Lord is picking on Peter...the same way He sometimes pesters us—remember He loves us with a love that will not let us go, thus He won't let us settle into a lifestyle that keeps Him on the fringe.

Peter and his partners have already been called by our Lord twice before. Although Peter has been associating with Jesus, he has not yet surrendered his life to the Lord. So Jesus decides to fully actualize Peter's call.

From a practical standpoint there appears to be several steps when Christ calls us to follow Him. Sir Lancelot Andrews the 15<sup>th</sup> century saint prayed, "Lord I thank you for my call, recall and many other calls besides." While some enjoy a sudden conversion—"I used to be a carouser and drunkard on Tuesday and then I went forward at a Christian meeting and became transformed Christians on Wednesday, never looking back." Most of us go through a gradual unfolding of faith. First we are introduced to Jesus and who He is and what He has done for us...then we get better acquainted with what it means to follow Him, we go through a Q & A search, then comes decision time.

In my devotions, I found an interesting distinction: Moses knew the ways of God; the children knew the acts of God. Jesus Christ invites us to move beyond just knowing about Him and into a personal experience with the God who created us.

Note the terminology Jesus uses, let us put out into the deep. If you are tired of a shallow existence living from paycheck to paycheck, weary from unfruitful endeavors like fishing all night and catching nothing—then let Me take you deeper.

Complying with this invitation is not easy. A good fisherman would tell you fish are caught in the shallow regions where fish feed. & it's safer to operate in the shallow superficial realm where most people prefer to keep their conversations.

Hence many miss out on the abundant life Christ offers because we don't feel comfortable plumbing the depths of our lives. C.S. Lewis writes a familiar captivity is preferred over an unfamiliar freedom. It is easier not to explore the fears & hurts behind our behaviors.

But the key to our passage is Peter acquiesced to Christ's request. This is crucial in the call of Christ because if Peter would not have conceded to Christ's request because of past fruitless efforts he would not have seen the power of God. There was once an ad in the paper: Set of Encyclopedias for sale never used; teenage son knows it all. There are times we have to trust God knows best

Notice what happens when God is involved: the catch is so over whelming two boats are filled to almost sinking! We struggle with life on our own, but when Christ enters the picture a new attitude becomes available: joy, peace, freedom from sinful habits--we become new people.

Scholars debate whether this was a miracle or not. Some feel it wasn't a miracle; Jesus the carpenter had a keener eye for fish than the professional fishermen did. Others believe Jesus supernaturally knew

where the fish where, or directed the fish to that spot. But the real miracle is the one that occurs in Peter's heart.

Peter's response is intriguing. He doesn't say: Wonderful, Jesus will be great for the fishing business! Peter recognizes he is in the presence of deity, which causes him to do some uncomfortable self introspection. When Peter ascertains Jesus' identity—divine nature, Peter becomes aware of his own identity—I am a sinful man. Peter realizes that the Holy God and his sinful self should not coexist...Depart from me. I'm not good enough for God.

This humble confession is the starting point of our faith. It is here we comprehend our need for forgiveness. Our real identity is not self sufficiency—we cannot save ourselves by being good. We cannot even clean up our lives without God's help. Just as Jesus chose Peter sins and all—so He chooses us.

Notice Jesus says, Fear Not. You do not need to be scared of God. Jesus is the One who removes the sin that separates us from God. Fear Not! Your old sin laden identity that left you broken & unfulfilled is forgiven-replaced with a new identity as a child of God.

With the new identity comes a new purpose in life. Follow Me, I will make you fishers of men. Instead of a life chasing after your own interests, let Jesus take care for you--while you live with & for Him.

The disciples left everything behind and followed Him. Again notice the process: they had accepted Christ as someone special, even gotten to know Him, and enjoyed associating with Him...but that is not Christianity.

God calls us to a new reality—that he has taken away our sin and we now belong to Him. 1 Peter 2:9...

When Ralph Socman was pastor of Christ's Methodist Church in NY City, he left Grand Central Station and took a cab to his church telling the cab driver take me to Christ's Church please, then opened his brief case and started working. The taxi driver drove a secuitous route and pulled up in front of Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Socman was flustered this isn't Christ's Church! To which the Cabby driver responded, listen laddie if He ain't here He ain't in town.

This is the goal when our friends have Q's & are struggling with the deeper meaning of life-- they seek us out because they know our identity that we have a connection to God!

We are called out of the shallows of self oriented disposition & our new identity brings a different purpose in life, investing in humanity.

We as Christ followers have the words of abundant and eternal life! That God loves you flaws and all and wants to trade out your sinful nature with His very own Spirit. Sin no longer needs to dictate your everyday. You can live with God starting now & on until forever!

So how do we get this message out there? Turn or Burn doesn't draw people to Christ. Telling them how sinful they are just results in shrugged shoulders.

A grandmother watched her daughter and grandson who were entrenched in a tug of war over whether or not he was going to take his medicine. Mom was trying to force the medicine down his throat with a spoon, and he wasn't letting her in. Finally in disgust mom throws up her hands and stomps out of the room. This is when Grandma goes to work. She asks if she could try to give him his medicine, Mom says be my guest. About 10 minutes later mom still steaming and stewing hears giggling and screams of delight coming from the boys' room. Mom peaks in and sees her son's mouth wide open and grandma has a squirt gun in hand firing the medicine mixed with cool Aid into her grandson's mouth.

The problem was not the medicine it was the method of delivery. The church needs to be creative in getting the message of Christ's love out to our world.

We can't expect this self absorbed society to respond to threats of judgment. Instead of scaring them into a relationship with God invite them to meet the God who loves them

Which means we need to reframe how we see the people around us. The President of Harvard University had a couple in his office who wanted to honor their son who was enrolled as a freshman, but tragically died. The president looked the couple from California over and assessing their attire decided they couldn't give much and called his assistant in to handle them. The couple thanked the assistant and went home to establish Stanford University.

The President missed them because he made an incorrect identity assessment. We too must realize that the people God puts in our paths-- each one of them has a special identity—Christ loves them, so much that He died for them...and wants us to go forward on His behalf telling people about His love.

This lent I'd like to challenge you instead of trying to give up Sweets, or Latte's or shopping, or whatever failed New Year's resolutions we are trying to take a stab at again, let's give God something He would really like...His followers reaching out to those around us with His love!

In the book Prodigal God there was the idea of Christians making daring moves with the intention of surprising God with our faith...trying to bring joy to His heart. According to Luke 15:7 There is more Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents then over the 99 righteous. Invite someone to Church this Lent season, do something unnatural for God...

Let's leave our old self oriented sinful nature behind and take on our new identity of being a child of God's.

Until you are a Christian with God's agenda on your schedules and Christ's love for others in your heart, you are a Christian with an Identity Crises.