

“Come And See”

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Your identity in Christ drives behavior, not the word Christian. *Toy Story 3*, Scene 33, “Goodbye Andy,” relates this experience regarding the significance of one’s identity on one’s behavior:

In the movie *Toy Story 3*, Andy, the owner of Woody, Buzz Lightyear, and other toys, is preparing to leave for college. At the end of the movie, he decides to give his toys to a young girl named Bonnie. The scene starts with Andy entering the front gate of Bonnie's home and showing her the box of toys. Andy tells her, “I’m Andy. Someone told me you’re really good with toys. These are mine, but I’m going away now, so I need someone really special to play with them.” Then as Andy proceeds to hand the toys to Bonnie, he introduces them by saying something special about each one. He begins with his toy cowgirl Jessie: “This is Jessie—the roughest, toughest cowgirl in the whole West. She loves critters, but none more’n her best pal, Bullseye.” Andy then hands Bonnie his toy Tyrannosaurus, Rex, “the meanest, most terrifying dinosaur who ever lived.” “For the Potato Heads, Andy says, “The Potato Heads—Mister and Missus. You gotta keep em together cause they’re madly in love.” Slinky the Dog “is as loyal as any dog you could want.” Andy blesses Hamm, the Pig, by saying, “He’ll keep your money safe, but he’s also one of the most dastardly villains of all time, Evil Dr. Pork Chop!” Buzz Lightyear is “the coolest toy ever. Look, he can fly, and shoot lasers. He’s sworn to protect the galaxy from the evil Emperor Zurg!” Finally, for his pal Woody, Andy says, “He’s been my pal as long as I can remember. He’s brave, like a cowboy should be. And kind, and smart. But the thing that makes Woody special? Is he’ll never give up on you—ever. He’ll be there for you, no matter what.”¹

God is with us no matter what in and through Jesus

Each of our texts, Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40:1-11, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 , and John 1:29-42 articulate the importance of “call,” witness, restoration, and God’s view of our identity even when it falters.

¹Source: *Toy Story 3, Scene 33, "Goodbye Andy,"* 1:28:55 to 1:32:05. This illustration is located on the website of preachingtoday.com.

The text in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 makes two points for our consideration about coming to God and seeing our identity through God's eyes on a regular basis.

First, there is trouble and conflict in the church at Corinth. The troubles in the church at Corinth are no different than those in the contemporary church. Disputes over doctrine. Lawsuits. Inappropriate sexual behavior. The church in Corinth was filled with drunks, sex fiends, and argumentative troublemakers. Take note of the "identity" language Paul uses to begin this letter to the Christians at the church in Corinth. Paul is "called to be an apostle by the will of God," verse one. Note how the receivers of this letter are not identified as drunks, sex fiends, and argumentative troublemakers, but "saints," verse two. The most important thing is not the trouble and conflict, but the call. Paul is already an apostle; the Corinthians are saints now. There is not some future time they will be better Christians. It is now and always progressing in knowledge, experience, and behaviors that are Christian.

Second, when God looks at our church, as it was when God looked at the church in Corinth, God does not see failures and troublemakers, but saints. The church in Corinth received a greeting of grace and peace from Paul in this letter. 1 Corinthians 1:3 reads, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The difference grace and peace provide to the troubled and conflict riddled church in Corinth is the ability to practice forgiveness, correction, refocusing on Jesus, and fine tuning the call, witness, and identity placed on each believer.

The text in John 1:29-42 makes two points for our consideration about coming to God and seeing our identity through God's eyes on a regular basis.

First, Jesus is the Word in the flesh and all things are brought into being with light and life through Jesus. The single witness of the church is Jesus, his identity and character. Jesus cannot be contained in human ideals and categories. You are invited to explore the nature of call, witness, and identity in Christ. This is done by trusting God as the source, sustainer, and focus of our call, witness, and identity.

Second, focusing on Jesus, we better understand our call, witness, and identity. Focusing on Jesus then allows you to rest and abide in God's presence as you move deeper and deeper in experiencing the profoundness of call, witness, and identity in Christ. As a follower of Jesus you are invited to slow down and reflect upon God's ongoing work of deepening your sense of self and sense of worth in the One who knows you the best and loves you the most. That being God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²

Come and see believers, together, undergoing transformation as an act of God. Come and see Christians being identified by their words and actions that provides the deeper meaning of the name Christian. In this way, you can reclaim the power of the name Christian and the symbol of the cross. Timothy Keller writes this about being anchored in transformation and words and behaviors that display the identity of God known in Jesus Christ,

...unlike either traditional or secular culture, a Christian's identity is not achieved but received. When we ask God the Father to accept us, adopt us, unite with us, not on the basis of our performance and moral efforts but because of Christ's, we receive a relationship with God that is a gift. It is not based on our past, present, or future attainments but on Christ's spiritual attainments.³

²In the four paragraphs above of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of James H. Evans Jr., John C. Holbert, Erin Keys, Stephen Farris, Matthew L. Skinner, Stanley P. Saunders, and Mark Abbott in *Connections, Year A, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 177-179, 179-181, 182-183, 184-186, 186-187, 188-190 and 190-192.

³Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York, New York: Viking, 2016), 136.

Your identity in Christ drives behavior, not the word Christian. God's acting in Jesus makes salvation real. You will know who you are and to whom you belong. Jesus. Trust God as the source, sustainer, and focus of your call, witness, and identity. Experience the profoundness of your call, witness, and identity in Christ. Amen.

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 15 January 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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