

Epiphany 4
“Identity: Finding Your Identity In Christ”
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

How many of you recognize the name Ted Giannoulas? Probably not many of you. But you may know his alter ego... For 42 years Ted Giannoulas has dressed up as the San Diego Chicken.

(Show Slide of Chicken)

You say, “Who cares about the San Diego Chicken?” Well, he was the very first professional mascot in all of sports. We wouldn’t have Fredbird without him. Now, even Trinity Lutheran School has a giant Panther.

Anyway, Ted retired after 42 years of doing this, after 42 years of being the San Diego Chicken, not just at games, but at hospitals, nursing homes, schools, day and night he is dressed up as the San Diego Chicken. Now that he is retired, he has discovered that he spent so much time as the San Diego chicken, day and night, that he has no identity apart from the chicken, now that he is retired.

He said, “I have plenty of Chicken stories, but no Ted stories.” **(Title Slide)**

Many people live their lives like this. They live their lives being someone that God did not create them to be. Wearing a costume. They run away from who God called them to be. They lose who they really are. They lose their identity.

8 years ago, a Georgia man was beaten and left for dead. He did recover, but he was left with total amnesia. Couldn’t remember a thing. FBI, DNA.. even Dr. Phil had him on his TV show. Today, he still doesn’t know who he is. He doesn’t know his identity. Can you imagine living like that?

But Sometimes we do live like that. We lose our identity in Christ. If you had to talk about your identity, how would you answer? What makes you special? What is enduring that gives meaning to your life?

If we try and find our identity in our accomplishments, apart from faith in Jesus, it will eventually break down. We do not always succeed. Often, we fail. That is part of being a sinful human being.

St. Paul in the Bible addressed this. In the church at Corinth, people were challenging Paul's credentials. Perhaps they didn't appreciate Paul's direct answers to the many challenges in that congregation. People were trying to diminish Paul and how the Lord was using him.

To the Corinthians, and later from prison, Paul says "If I wanted to, I could boast. I could find my confidence in the flesh and in my accomplishments for the Lord. I am a Hebrew of Hebrews. I am of the Tribe of Benjamin. I have suffered for the Lord... I've been beaten. I've been stoned. Three times I've been shipwrecked. I spent a day and a night in the water on open sea. I've hungered and thirst, been cold and naked for the Lord." I could brag about all I've done.

But he says, "NO! I consider that all rubbish, that I may gain Christ. It's not a righteousness of my own, but faith in Christ that matters." In other words, Paul says "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Today, I want you to think about someone who lost his identity. His name was Moses. There was a time when God's people were slaves in Egypt. And the Jews flourished, to the point that they were almost outnumbering the Egyptians. The

Egyptians said “This is bad. We have to do something.” So they ordered all Jewish boys that are born should be killed, thrown into the Nile River.

When Moses was born, Moses’ mom disobeyed. Instead, she took a basket, painted it with tar and pitch, Moses in the basket and floated him out into the Nile River. The Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses, knew he was Israelite, but chose to adopt him. Moses became the adopted Grandchild of the Pharaoh of Egypt. This means that Moses was raised in Luxury and with the best education, the best food, the best of everything.

Everything was great until Moses, in a fit of rage, killed an Egyptian who was fighting a Hebrew slave. People saw it. People began to talk. Moses flees.

He ends up at Mount Horeb. Horeb means “wilderness, desolate place, wasteland.” Have you ever lived in your own Horeb, your own wilderness, your own wasteland?

Moses Success went to Failure. Winner to Loser. He lost everything overnight.

We know what that feels like, too. We’ve all felt like a failure, like we were living in our own Horeb, our own wasteland. The devil loves it when we are miserable.

That’s OK. Our God does some of his best work in a wasteland.

Well, time passes, and God appears to Moses in the midst of a burning bush that is not being burned up or consumed. And God calls Moses to be His spokesman to go back to Egypt, back to the Pharaoh, and to demand that God’s people be set free.

God is literally telling Moses that God is going to accomplish His will through Moses. And God does the same thing with us. Luther called this the Doctrine of Vocation. As we are living our faith, living out our vocation, God is using us and working

through us. God literally works through us to bless others. We get so caught up in this world, in our times of desolation and discouragement, that we forget God USES US!

In effect what God says to Moses, "I am sending You Moses, Back to the Egypt. I am taking you out of this miserable wasteland and giving you a purpose. A hope and a future. An identity if you will.

I want you to think about 2 words: Relief and Hope.

Relief... looks backward and says "I'm glad it's over." (Wish our life away!)

Hope... looks forward and says, "I can't wait for what God has in store for me."

Moses kept looking backwards. "I can't do this Lord." And Moses gave reason after reason as to why who he had been and what he had done would disqualify him.

Moses even said, "What if they ask me Your Name, Lord? What will I say?"

God says, "I Am Who I Am." Tell them "I Am" sent You.

In other words, I AM is eternal. I AM there in your past. I AM there in your present. I AM with you for eternity. I Am the Ruler of the universe. Everything Is Mine. I Am in control. Moses moved forward in faith.

Today: How do you define Your Identity? Do you want to stay in the Horeb, the wasteland of regret and fear? Or do you move forward in Hope, trusting God and saying, "I can't wait for what is coming, for what God has in store for me?"

Let me share 3 quick points about Your identity in Christ.

First, God's EXISTENCE is greater than Our Existence. This leads to humility.

Humility recognizes that I can't do it. I am too weak, cumbered with a load of fear. God God is in control of everything. God has called You to His family. He means it when He

says that He will work everything for our good. The Lord who is in control, The Lord who called you by name, He's got this!

Listen to **Psalm 46...** "**Be still and know that I am God.**" WE don't need all of the answers. **Your identity** is in the one who called, adopted and loves us. He is in control.

Second Point: His RIGHTEOUSNESS IS GREATER THAN OUR FAILURE.

This brings peace.

Satan loves to lay on the guilt, the regret, the insecurities, the shame. Satan is a wizard and getting us to stay at Horeb, the wilderness and wasteland of life. UNTIL we recognize that God's Righteousness is Greater than our Guilt. Until we realize that God means it when He says "I have washed away Your sin. The Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ, died for us. Jesus went to the desolation of the cross and died for you and me. And because our sins have been paid for, He remembers them no more. **Your identity is found in sins forgiven through Jesus.**

Third point: God's POWER is greater than Our power. This leads to vocation. God is working in us and through us. It's not us. It's Him. It's His power. He could do everything without us, but He chooses to work through us. WE are his FINGERPRINTS in the world today, He has given You a mission and a ministry, right where you are.

Your identity is found in serving HIM.

It's easy to look back in regret, hopelessness. But God lifts you up, and He points you forward in hope.