

**Sermon Series: “Becoming God’s Humble Hero: Elijah”–Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—9/23/07**

**Title: “Identity Crisis”**

**Text: Matthew 16: 13-16**

**Intro.: Ills.: Knowing who the Santa was**

**Theme:** Jesus was never confused as to who he was and so when we come to know Jesus as our Savior, we find the confidence to lose ourselves in him so that we might find our fulfilled identity and purpose in his life.

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20*

### **Clearing up our identity crisis in Jesus’ identity**

- It comes from knowing who Jesus is rather than what we want to make him to be
  1. The people of Jesus’s day mistook him for something he was not (**Print Matthew 16: 13-14**)
    - a. As a “christ” (political messiah) rather than as the “Christ” – God’s only way
    - b. John the Baptist, risen from the dead, as a charismatic rock star standing up to power (**Print Mat 14: 1-2**)
    - c. As Elijah, prophesied cleanser of Israel by making them feel good about feeling bad (**Print Mal. 4: 5-6**)
    - d. As Jeremiah — restorer of Judah as a political force (**Ills.: Rumor of Jeremiah’s return of ark**)
    - e. As one of the prophet — moral conscience of the nation
  2. Often we view Jesus the way the world wants him/his church to be
    - a. **A club** with club benefits (entertainment [programs/events] and services [baptize, confirm, marry, bury])
    - b. **A moral conscience** of the community/nation – attrition rather than real repentance that brings life (**2 Cor7:10**)
    - c. **A charity foundation** for every social ill the government and community don’t want to be bothered with
- Knowing who Jesus really was so that you can know who you are
  1. He was the hope of all the prophets who pointed people to him
    - a. Elijah knew that the only hope for a sin-sick Israel was to turn to the one who could save them from themselves
    - b. Unless Jesus changes you from the inside out, you have no part in him (**Print Mark 8: 34-38**)
    - c. **Ills.: Priest removes tattoos from gang members**
  2. It reflects a commitment coming from a confession if we really believe who He said he is (**Print Matt 16: 15-16**)
    - a. **THE CHRIST**--*God’s anointed* – the only way to heaven (Acts. 4: 12) — compromise all else before Him
    - b. **THE SON OF GOD**—able to do what he says he has and will do – willing to trust in him for your life
    - c. **THE LIVING GOD**—the resurrection & life – makes all the difference in way you live out rest of your life
  3. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 Cor. 5:17*

### **Living as if we have a clear focus on who and what we are**

- Jesus always had a clear focus on who he was and what was his purpose
  1. *“You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*
  2. Jesus’ passion was to do God’s will(*“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. John 4:34*)
  3. Jesus was purposeful in his actions (*The time was coming closer for Jesus to be taken to heaven. So he*

*was determined to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51)*

4. Allowing Christ to redeem every part of your life with God's passion and purpose
- The prophets who pointed to Christ had a clear picture
  1. Elijah was powerful in word and action with an audience of one
    - a. *Elijah said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make known today that you are God in Israel and that I'm your servant and have done all these things by your instructions. 1 Kings 18: 36*
    2. John the Baptist gave testimony to Jesus as his purpose (*He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3: 30*)
    3. Using these "heros" of faith as role models of your own walk by faith
  - God calls us to identity with his Son, Jesus Christ
    1. *"This is my Son, whom I love and with whom I am pleased. Listen to him!" Mat17:5*
    2. God calls us to give bold and uncompromised witness to Jesus in our lives
      - a. **Ills.:We are not in the world bearing witness to Christ. We are in Christ bearing witness to the world.** Allen Fleece
      - b. *But my righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Heb 10:38-39*
      - c. *Fight the good fight for the Christian faith. Take hold of everlasting life to which you were called and about which you made a good testimony in front of many witnesses. 1 Tim. 6:12*

### **Knowing who the Santa was**

Just the other day I was in the store and saw how all the Christmas decorations are already popping up. I thought to myself, "I wish they really knew what Christmas really was all about. Soon they will hire on people who will be masquerading as the Santa Clauses. It made me think of a family which I knew from one of my first churches. The father decided to moon-light and make a little extra money before Christmas, posing as Santa. As Christmas drew closer, his wife decided to take their four year old son, Kevin, shopping and promised to take him to see Santa. They stood in line together for about a hour and finally got to see Santa. ON the way home, Kevin's mom asked, "Well, what did you think of Santa?" "That wasn't Santa!" Kevin exclaimed. "What do you mean?" his mother asked, "Who did you think he was?" "That was Dad, dressed up and besides you and he are the ones who buy me the presents. I saw you picking one out when we were shopping before." Kevin astutely had cut through all the hype surrounding the Santa Claus legend, and he saw clearly who it really was under that beard and red coat.

### **Priest Removes Tattoos of Gang Members**

Father Greg Boyle is in the business of erasing the past. A Jesuit priest who is the founder and director of Homeboy Industries in East Los Angeles, Father Boyle has put together a team of physicians trained in the laser technology of tattoo removal. The team is part of a program that takes the tattoos of ex-gang members and wipes the slate clean. For many, it is as crucial a service as it is merciful. Gang-related tattoos prevent many former gang members from getting jobs or advancing in work. For others, the markings critically impinge on mental health or put them in serious danger on the streets. There is no fee or community service required to receive the tattoo removal offered by Homeboy Industries. It is strictly a gift—perhaps a modern look at Christ washing the feet of his friends. Currently, there is a waiting list of over a thousand names. For those involved, the spiritual imagery is often compelling. The seeming permanence of a gang tattoo fosters the attitude that the gang's claim is also permanent. It is a mark of ownership as much as identity. The emotional consequence is that it seems a part of you that can never be shaken. I suspect some of us have felt like this with past mistakes—sins whose mark we cannot shake off though we know we have been cleansed by Christ. Perhaps the imagery of tattoo removal can evoke a renewed sense of our blessed assurance. Like former gang members who have had the marks of a former life removed, so our sins are blotted out by the blood of Christ. They are remembered no longer. **Jill Carattini, "A Slice of Infinity," No. 1186, rzm.org (6-23-06); submitted by Jerry De Luca, Montreal West, Quebec, Canada**

**Matthew 16:13-16**

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup>And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [NASB]

**Mat 14: 1-2**

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

**Malachi 4: 5-6**

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

**Mark 8: 34-38**

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."