

Sermon – Beneath the Surface
Sunday July 26, 2020

Author Gordon McDonald tells the story of a man who built a boat. He wanted to make something that would impress others.

So he outfitted his boat with colourful sails, complex rigging and luxurious cabins. The decks were made from beautiful wood. The fittings were made of polished brass. But because he was so obsessed with how his boat looked, he didn't care too much about how it was made.

When the day came for the boat's maiden voyage, people came from all over to see this boat. Everyone remarked how they had never seen a more impressive boat. The man burst with pride over what he had accomplished.

But a few miles out to sea, a storm arose. Winds gusted over forty knots. Waves over fifteen feet crashed against the boat. Water swept over the sides. The boat began to shudder. The man wasn't so confident anymore.

When the next wave hit, the boat capsized. Now, boats are supposed to withstand these kind of storms. But this one didn't. Why not?

Because this boat was designed to look good to others. It wasn't designed to withstand the storm. Because below the boat's waterline, there was no weight there. A boat needs more weight below the waterline than above. Why? It's so that when a storm hits, it can right itself back again. But when a storm hit this boat, it sank.

It was only after the wreckage of the boat washed ashore, that people discovered how inadequately this boat was designed. There simply wasn't enough weight below the waterline to support it.

Now we've been in this pandemic for about four months. We've all been thrown into uncharted waters. We've all been in a storm. We've all had water fill up in our boats.

The question is, are you equipped to endure this storm? Is there enough weight below your waterline?

We're in a series these days called *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. We're learning to integrate our emotional health with our spirituality.

This series is about expanding our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. It's learning that our spirituality isn't just about our thoughts and our behaviours. It's also about our emotions. Because the truth is, **you can't be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.**

We're all in a storm right now. We're all affected by this pandemic.

Many of you are thinking,

- I miss my friends
- I miss my routines
- I miss my sports
- I miss going out.

Many of you are thinking,

- I don't know if I can handle this pressure.
- I don't know if I'll get out of this debt.
- I don't know if my marriage will survive.
- I don't know if I'll get a job.

We're all in a storm. The question is, what kind of boat are you in?

That's what we'll be talking about today. Our passage is found in Mark 1:9-13.

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. (Mark 1:9-13, NLT)

How do you stay afloat when the storm knocks you around?

You **Get your identity straight.**

This theme of identity is an important theme in the book of Mark. During his life and ministry, Jesus faced tremendous adversity.

- His disciples misunderstood him.
- His friends abandoned him.
- The crowds used him.
- Religious leaders attacked him.

During his last few days, he was

- falsely accused and convicted
- humiliated and insulted
- tortured and afflicted
- and ultimately executed.

And yet, Jesus never faltered. Instead he faithfully lived out his calling. How could he do that? He could do that because he got his identity straight.

Both Matthew and Luke begin their gospels with Jesus' birth. But Mark begins his gospel with Jesus' baptism. Mark wants us to see that the reason Jesus could face the storm was because he knew who he was. He got his identity straight.

Mark also wants his readers to know who they are and to get their identity straight. You see, Mark was writing to Christians in Rome who were going through a crisis of their own. Not a COVID pandemic, but a wide-scale persecution by the Emperor Nero.

In AD 64, a Great Fire burned down most of Rome. Rumours swirled that it was Nero who did it. But Nero denied it and blamed the Christians. He had them arrested, tortured and killed.

These Christians in Rome faced tremendous pressure. Mark knew that if they didn't get their identity straight they would never make it. So he establishes their identity.

You are a beloved child of God! This is who you really are.

You and I need a clear sense of our identity now more than ever. You need to know who you are when all these things are happening. When...

- Your life has been disrupted
- Your job is at risk
- Your health is failing
- Your marriage is on the rocks
- Your relationships are struggling
- Your loved ones are hurting
- Your future is uncertain

Even when your whole world has changed, one thing about you hasn't changed. You are a beloved child of God.

In fact, go ahead and write in that in the chat.

Author Brennan Manning offers this powerful challenge:

Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that and let it become the most important thing in your life.

The most important thing in your life isn't what happens to you, it's who you are.

- Even though you're exhausted trying to juggle work and the kids. You're overwhelmed and feel like you're failing at both. God says, you are my beloved child.
- You lose your job and your finances are tight. You're worried and scared for the future. God says, you are my beloved child.
- You're living alone. You see people posting photos of their family and you wish you had someone in your life. God says, you are my beloved child.
- You have a loved one who's sick. You're worried about their physical and mental health. God says, you are my beloved child.
- Your marriage has been rough. You're both hurt and angry. You're barely talking to each other and you're not sure if you'll make it. God says, you are my beloved child.

It's critical you establish your identity in Christ. Because we live in a world where other voices are trying to tell you who you are. **You need to reject these counterfeit identities.**

We see this in the temptation of Jesus. Jesus was offered three counterfeit identities.

The first counterfeit identity is, ***You are what you do***. Your identity is your role. You're a student, a parent, a breadwinner. But the problem with this identity is that you'll only feel good about yourself as

long as you're performing. But if you fail a test, if you miss a goal, if you lose a relationship, if you lose your job, you won't know who you are anymore.

The second counterfeit identity is, ***You are what people say about you***. Your identity is your image. What do people think? The problem with this identity is that you'll only feel good about yourself as long as people like you. But that means you're always trying to impress. Because once you stop, people will stop liking you and you'll fall into depression.

The third counterfeit identity is, ***You are what you have***. Your identity is what you have. Your possessions, your job, your relationships, your status, your health. These are all good things. But the problem with this identity is you can lose all of it just like that. What happens to you then?

All these things have their proper place in your life. They're good things that God wants to bless you with. But here's the problem.

If you establish your identity on any of these counterfeits, you won't make it when the storm comes. Just like that boat, you'll come apart, you'll sink. Why? Because these counterfeits can't hold up to the pressure, they can't carry you through the storm. They simply don't have enough weight below the waterline.

Why? Because they're not who you are at the core. The most important thing about you isn't what you do, it isn't what people think of you, it isn't what you have. The most important thing about you is that you are loved by God.

Pete Scazzero puts it like this.

Living and swimming in the river of God's deep love for us... is at the very heart of true spirituality... Only the love of God... is capable of bearing the weight of our true identity.

God knows that these counterfeit identities won't hold up in the storm.

Jesus was tempted in the desert right after his baptism. He could have chosen the easier way or the faster way. But Jesus knew who he was. God was preparing him by establishing his identity, you are my beloved son.

And listen up, because God wants to prepare you by establishing your identity. You're not what you do, you're not what people think of you and you're not what you have. God says, you are my beloved child.

And if you get nothing else from this message, that's enough.

Imagine what it was like for those Christians in Rome. They were losing their families, their friends, their jobs, even their lives. And if they didn't get their identity straight, they wouldn't make it. That's why it's so important to establish your identity in Christ. To hear God say to you:

- I have loved you, with an everlasting love. (Jer 31:3)
- I have engraved you in the palm of my hands. (Is 49:16)
- you are precious to me.... and I love you. (Is 43:4)
- Even though your father and mother abandon you, I will hold you close (Ps 27:10)
- Because you are my beloved child.

Most of you know this. You know God loves you, you know you're a child of God. But what are you supposed to do with that?

Christian authors Randy Reese and Robert Loane say:

Claiming, embracing and resting in our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God is a fundamental practice we return to repeatedly.

Now what's the key word in this phrase? *Repeatedly*. It's like washing your hair. You lather, rinse and repeat.

It's not enough to hear one sermon. **You need to claim your identity... repeatedly.**

Jesus could endure the storm because he claimed his identity repeatedly. In his three years of public ministry, Jesus often got away to pray and centre himself in his identity. He would go off on his own and say,

I am God's beloved Son. It doesn't matter what people are saying about me. It doesn't matter what's happening to me. I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to love the people God wants me to love. I'm going to do what God wants me to do.

In fact, for Jesus, this started even *before* his public ministry. In the 30 years leading up to it, Jesus was already establishing his identity. Learning to see himself as God's beloved son.

If you're going to make it, you need to claim your identity repeatedly. Lather, rinse, repeat.

How many of you knew that I have a bilingual certificate in French? Probably not many of you. That's because I can't "parle" much French too well. I've forgotten most of what I learned. Why? Because I haven't practiced it!

In the same way, learning to see yourself as a beloved child of God is like learning a second language. You need to practice and repeat it.

You need to engage in spiritual practices. Practices like,

- Prayer
- Reading the Bible and other spiritual books
- Journaling
- Listening to worship music
- Being part of a small group or Christian community.

Like learning a second language, if you don't practice it, you'll lose it. You need to return to this truth over and over. You need to let it sink deeper. You need to let it transform you.

Because let's face it. It's easy to feel loved by God when things are going well. But it's a lot harder when you're in a storm.

Remember Peter? When the sea was calm, he actually walked on water! But what happened when he saw the storm? He began to sink.

Like many of you, there have been many times during this pandemic when it felt like I was sinking. Times when I felt overwhelmed, emotionally and mentally drained, tired and frustrated. I still spend time with God daily, but it's definitely been a dry season for my soul.

And do you know what the crazy part is? I've actually been reading a daily devotional book, since the beginning of the year called *Being the Beloved*. Because even though I know it in my mind, it hasn't always connected deeply enough with me in my heart. Because these days, it seems like so much of my identity is tied up in what I do.

- Groceries and surfaces I need to wipe down
- Things I need to do for work
- Ways I need to help my kids at home
- People I need to support.

It's so easy for these counterfeit identities to take over. Especially when you're tired and frustrated. That's usually when your boat begins to take on water.

But what did Peter do when he began to sink? He actually did probably the smartest thing he could have done. He didn't try to save himself. He didn't just tell himself he'd be okay. Instead, he offered up this simple but powerful prayer, "Save me, Lord!"

And what did Jesus do? He answered that prayer! He *immediately* reached out and pulled him back up.

You are a beloved child of God. Which means that you have a heavenly father.

- He will never leave you or forsake you (Deut 31:6)
- He will strengthen you and guard you (2 Thess 3:3)
- He will give you his all-sufficient grace (2 Cor 12:9)
- He will supply all your needs (Phil 4:19)
- He will be close when you're broken hearted (Ps 34:18)
- He will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)
- He will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7)
- And when you're drowning in the storm and starting to sink, He will reach out and pull you back up.

You are a beloved child of God! This truth is the weight that will keep you steady in the storm. So claim this identity repeatedly. Embrace it and let it become the most important thing about you.