

## **“The Steward’s Identity; Called to be Saints”**

**Romans 1:7 - “To all those in Rome, who are loved by God and called to be saints!”**

All Saints Sunday – Stewardship Sunday 1 – Nov 2, 2014

The word “identity” is certainly is a very big word among us these days in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century isn’t it? And yet the word “identity” can still be difficult to define. We all know what it means when we hear the news reporter say: “The ‘identity’ of the criminal is not known;” or to tell us when the wrong person is arrested that it was a case of “mistaken identity.” Many people today live in extreme fear of having their identities stolen. As children grow, they work hard to establish their own identities; sometimes an identity in close kinship to their parents and their family of origin; while at other times they seek to establish for themselves that are the complete opposite of their parents and family of origin.

At more and more public places, like airports and hotels, we have to show to other people some proof of our own identity, such as a driver’s license or some other form of picture identification.

**It was vogue back in early 1970s, when I was in high school, and our dear spiritual mother Miss Gladys Meetze was only in her 60s, to hear many people say that they were struggling with an identity crisis,** but I am quite certain that this is nothing that people ever said when **Mrs. Gladys Meetze (now 100 years old) was a young woman in her 20s or 30s.** People, back then, for the most part, were very sure of their identities, because for so many people living in our country and around the world in 1924 and 1934, **their identity was given to them primarily in their relationship with God.** Just think of all the many, many names throughout the Bible by which the LORD God Almighty, first of all, purposely chooses to reveal his truest identity to us!

When God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 20, informing Moses that he had an extremely important assignment for him—that he was to be God’s chief spokesman in liberating the people of Israel from 400 years of slavery and bondage in that great nation of Egypt, you may remember how boldly Moses questioned God speaking out of that burning bush that just kept on burning and burning and burning but that never burned up: *“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘the God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And God said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you!’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations!” (Exodus 20:13-15)*

**God’s name is extremely important to him and God’s name should also be very important to us because God’s name is intimately tied up with the very self-revelation of his identity to us!** Remember the Second Commandment? *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain!”* And then Moses goes on to further caution us: *“For the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain!” (Exodus 20:7)*

**Here are just a few of the names by which the LORD God Almighty reveals himself to us in the Bible. In the Old Testament,** God has various Hebrew names by which he reveals himself to us. He is **“Elohim,”** the first name of God revealed in the Book of Genesis. Elohim is a collective now with a plural form, certainly hinting at the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; our God who is one divine Being in three Distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth!”* And God said, *“Let us make man in our image!”* Our God is **“Yahweh,”** the “One who causes things to be!” He is our **“Adonai”** the “Our Master.” He is **“Jehovah Jireh,”** the “Lord will provide.” He is **“El Shaddia,”** the “Almighty God.” He is **“Jehovah Shalom,”** the “Lord is Peace.” He is our “Creator,” “Redeemer.”

**And then there are many by which Jesus the Son of God is revealed to us.** He too is the “Almighty One,” the “Alpha and the Omega,” the “Anointed One,” the “Messiah,” the “Savior,” the “Branch of

David," the "Bread of Life," the "Son of the living God," the "Heavenly Bridegroom," the "Good Shepherd," and he is "Emmanuel," which means "God with us." Our God is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Advocate and our Counselor.

**And in the pages of the Bible, God assigns many different names to us, by which he seeks to shape our very identities for us and to give us in our new relationship with him, through the gift of his Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!**

**1. DISCIPLE.** One of the words that the New Testament uses to describe us in our relationship to Jesus is that of being his "disciple." In its most basic meaning, a "disciple" is a "student" or "one who learns; a lifelong learner" with respect to one's teacher. In every case the word "disciple" implies that one not only accepts the teachings of their teacher as true, but that he also seeks to put into practice the teachings of his teacher in his personal life every day.

**2. SHEEP.** Another name which the New Testament ascribes to us concerning our relationship to Jesus is that of being "sheep" who now live out our whole lives in our relationship to God through Jesus Christ who is now our "Good Shepherd" (John 10).

**3. BRANCHES.** The New Testament says that Jesus is the True Vine and that we are the "branches" (John 15).

**4. LIVING STONES.** The New Testament says that we are "living stones" in our relationship to Jesus Christ, who is the "chief cornerstone!" Now here's a real oxymoron if ever there was one! How can a "stone" be "living"? But this is precisely what St. Peter writes in **I Peter 2:4-6**: "*As you come to him a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ!*"

**These are just four on the many new names that God has given to us** who have been baptized and brought to faith through the Gospel in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And don't forget the first one I mentioned, in addition to these other four, that of **our being "CHILDREN" of God. We love him only because he first loved us. In this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave up his Son to be a sacrifice for our sins!**

**Have you ever seen the musical "Annie?" All the children in the orphanage hope that someday, someone will want to take them home and make them their very own children.** Not in Annie's wildest dreams, did she ever think someone as rich and wonderful like Daddy Warbucks would choose her to be his own daughter and to come and live with him! "*Why would anyone want someone so plain and ordinary as me to become their child?*" Annie questioned herself. For Annie it was a "Pinch-me-and-tell-me-it's-real" experience.

**So it is in being a child of God—but in a much, much more dramatic way because it is real.** There is no reason I ought to hold this hope in my God that God would want me and choose me to become his very own child. The sad truth as Paul expresses it initially in **Ephesians 2:3-7** is that we all, by nature, "*We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up to be seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus!*"

**But on this All Saints Sunday, God himself invites us to think about our own identity in our relationship to him; our identity as the stewards of the mysteries of God—as those who now know and believe that God has called us to be “saints.”** Why St. Paul begins the vast majority of his letters to the various New Testament congregations he is writing by addressing the members of those churches as people who are **“called by God to be saints.”**

Take the beginning of his letter to the **church at Colossae: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints** and faithful brothers and sisters in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father!”

In his opening words to the church **at Philippi, Paul writes: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In his opening words to the churches at **Corinth and Rome he calls the many people who are believers there, “saints.”**

**The English word “saint” is derived from the Latin word “sanctus” which means “holy,”** and is most always used to translate the Greek word in the New Testament *hagios*, which also means “holy one,” or those “set apart” to be used by God as his own people for his own special purposes the word appears 229 times in the Greek New Testament.

**As we Lutherans read and study the New Testament Scriptures, we believe that all Christians, whether in heaven or on earth, are regarded by God to be saints.** We furthermore believe teach and confess according to the **Apology of the Augsburg Confession** that we best honor the saints in glory: (1) First by our thanking God that he made them examples of his mercy; (2) Secondly, for their willingness to suffer for Christ and even to suffer martyrdom for him; and (3) Thirdly, when we do our best with the help of the Holy Spirit to imitate their faith and other virtues.

**Ruth Graham Bell, the sainted wife of Dr. Billy Graham once said that saints are people who make it much easier for us to believe in Jesus, because we see Jesus and his love alive in them!**

**We remember and celebrate our belief in THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.**

**Or there is that other little story about a man who waved down a taxi cab in New York City. When the driver was getting close to his destination, he reached out his hand and tapped the driver on the shoulder without saying a word.** To this man’s complete surprise, the taxi cab driver jumped so far that he bumped his head rather severely on the ceiling of the cab and let out a loud scream to boot.

“Excuse me,” the passenger said to the cab driver: “I didn’t mean to startle you!”

“Oh, it’s not your fault mister the cab driver said, “But this is my first day of driving a cab. For the past years I have worked for a funeral home and only driven a hearse!”

I like that little story **about the two Italian brothers who were members of the Mafia in Chicago.** The brothers’ names were Antonio and Luigi. When Antonio was gunned down by the mob, Luigi went to the priest and told him, “Father, I want you to say some nice things about my brother Antonio. I want you to tell the people that he was a real saint!”

The priest was at a complete loss as to what to do, for Antonio had committed many crimes, therefore the priest felt it necessary to tell the gathered congregation some of the bad things which Antonio had done for which he needed forgiveness. But then went on to close his homily by saying: “Yes, Antonio was a bad man, but in comparison to Luigi he was a real saint!”

We want to find our acceptance in the eyes of God by comparing ourselves to others. GOD HIGHER STANDARD...YOU MUST BE HOLY AS I THE LORD YOUR GOD AND HOLY. ONLY CELEBRATE IT PROPERLY JESUS IS THE NUMBER ONE SACRIFICE, BORE OUR SINS BODY TREE...BY HIS STRIPES YOU ARE HEALED.

**Brothers and sisters, you and I know that there are three words that we love to say whenever we feel we have just completed and finished a task that was both difficult and important.** These three words are: **"I DID IT!"** These three words are the very words that Donny Osmond said when it was announced that he was the celebrity winner of the ninth competition "DANCING WITH THE STARS" in 2009. But those three little words **"I DID IT"** were not easy to come by. For the final weeks of the ten-week competition Donny danced on a broken toe. It took a physical toll on Donny as he related, "I don't think I've worked harder for any accolade that I have this one. When you record an album and it goes platinum, yeah, you're in the studio and you work hard for months, but it's not like your whole body hurts!" **The competition was emotionally draining. He noted on his blog that the "culmination of nine weeks filled with blood, sweat and tears comes down to this—the finals."** So disturbing were the finals that his professional dance partner, Kym Johnson, had to encourage Donny to continue. On the Sunday night before Tuesday's final performance, Donny was lying down and lamenting that he could not continue, only to have Kym revitalize him by saying, "WE have to do it one more time!" **And one more time they did do it, and at the age of 51 Donny Osmond became the oldest winner ever as a contestant on DANCING WITH THE STARS.**

You know brothers and sisters as we are gathered here to celebrate All Saints Day today, we could be tempted to falsely believe that those who paid their ultimate sacrifice with their life's blood and suffering to remain bold and courageous witnesses to the Gospel did so in the strength of their own power when nothing could be further from the truth, and they themselves would be the very first ones today to make this announcement to us.

We know that the saints being addressed in the letter to the Hebrews, as it is found in the New Testament, were struggling with everything inside of them to hold on to their faith in the face of all sorts of horrendous persecutions coming at them, not only from strangers, but in many respects, from their own blood relatives themselves!

Yes, they make a bold profession of faith when we hear them say in Hebrews 10:23-25, *"Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL; AND LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIMULATE ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS, NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER, AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY IS DRAWING NEAR!"* Amen