

HIGHLY VALUED - IDENTITY THEFT
A SERMON BASED ON EPHESIANS 1:3-14
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2019
10:00 a.m.

I am a fan of many movies directed by Tim Burton.

For as well as being quirky,

and often pulling in Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter,
many of his movies are about identity, and story.

He manages to get you reflecting on who you are,
and what your story is.

In his movie, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*,

Jack Skellington, who is in charge of Halloween,
and all things spooky and scary,

learns that there are other holidays,

He is bored with Halloween, feels he's done all that,

that maybe he is called to be something different.

He decides that he wants to be Santa Claus.

He gets Santa out of the way, and takes over Christmas.

Christmas with Jack Skellington in charge is a disaster.

Among other things, toys become monsters.

Children end up terrified.

Jack Skellington was the wrong person in the wrong story.

He returns to Halloween, knowing who he is.

In Tim Burton's interpretation of Alice In Wonderland,

Alice has come to Wonderland to slay the evil Jabberwocky
and free Wonderland from the tyranny of the Queen of Hearts.

My favourite scenes in Burton's movie are Alice's conversations

with an Oracle, the prophet, the wiseman, the seer,
who just happens to be a blue caterpillar named Absolem.

Meeting Absolem for the first time,

confused about why she is in Wonderland,
there are introductions.

I'm Absolem says the blue caterpillar.

The question is... who are you?

She answers, "Alice".

"We shall see", he replies.

Alice is confused and annoyed.

"What do you mean by that? I ought to know who I am!"

"Yes you ought, silly girl."

They consult a prophetic scroll to see if Alice is indeed

the one who will slay the Jabberwocky.

Looking at the picture, Alice says, 'That's not me.'

There's a bit of panic amongst the animals of Wonderland.

Resolve this for us Absolem.

Is she the right Alice?

The blue caterpillar looks Alice in the eye and says,

'Not hardly.'

The movie progresses.

Alice undertakes challenges.

She discovers her bravery.

She experiences her commitment to do right by
and serve and help those around her.

Later in the movie she meets Absolem again.

He asks her again,

‘Who are you?’

She replies, “I thought we’d settled this. I’m Alice.

But not that one.” pointing to the picture of the girl
slaying the Jabberwocky.

“How do you know?” asked Absolem.

“You said so yourself!” She replies confused.

“I said you were not hardly Alice.

But you’re much more her now.

In fact, you’re Almost Alice.”

Then at the end of the movie,

about to confront the Jabberwocky, Alice has one last meeting

with the blue caterpillar, who is wrapping himself into a chrysalis.

She says to him, "Don't go! I need your help.

I don't know what to do!!"

Absolem says to her,

"I can't help you

if you don't even know who you are silly girl!"

Alice has a moment.

"I'm not silly! My name is Alice.

I live in London. I have a mother named Helen

and a sister named Margaret.

My father was Charles Kingsley.

He had a vision that stretched half-way around the world

and nothing ever stopped him.

He would have like it here."

There was a pause as she realized.

"I'm his daughter. I'm Alice Kingsley."

Absolem declared, "Alice at last."

Alice goes on to slay the Jabberwocky

and the people of Wonderland from the tyranny

of the Queen of Hearts.

Who are you?

Your answer is probably the most important,

telling, revealing, and motivating thing about you.

Who are you?

Your answer will inform you and shape you.

Who are you?

Your answer will define you and direct you.

We live in an era that thinks it knows what to do with this question,

and how this question should be answered.

We live in a culture that says you get to answer this question

any way you choose.

But with this approach, with this value,

we have created a tyranny of identity.

We have placed ourselves under a tyranny of choices

and called the tyranny freedom.

We now ask people to identify their gender.

People are choosing to identify with a skin colour.

People are choosing to identify their age,

not by the date they were born,

but by how old they feel themselves to be.

We live in a world that has become a world of identity politics.

Wikipedia says

“the term identity politics in common usage

refers to a tendency of people sharing a particular racial,

religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity

to form exclusive political alliances,

instead of engaging in traditional broad-based party politics,

or to promote their particular interests

without regard for interests of a larger political group.”¹

So yes we live in a time where we are told you can

and you should choose your identity.

But in the doing, your choice will label you and assign you to a group.

What you choose, will likely put you in juxtaposition

or opposition to someone else’s choice of identity.

In the past weeks we have seen an example of this in the news.

Martina Navratilova rose to tennis fame in the 1970’s.

She came out as gay in a time

when doing so came at great personal cost.

In that sense she is, or should be, legendary in the gay community.

And was.

Until she recently stated that transgender women,

men identifying as women,

should not be permitted in the female categories

of sport as they compete with an unfair advantage.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_politics

Martina has a new identity now, given to her by others.

Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. Terf.

She has been dropped into the piranha filled water of identity politics.

It is a tyranny of identity.

We have placed ourselves under a tyranny of our choices

calling it freedom,

only to have those choices be the basis for a whole

new generation of prejudice, exclusion, dismissal,

leading to as much hatred, judgement and alienation

as there ever was,

if not more.

Answering the question, 'Who are you?'

is so big, so impactful, so important, so rich

that Tim Burton can make movie after movie about it.

That question is so important, that God,

knowing we tend to trap and enslave ourselves

God, who knows that the kings of the Old Testament

the ones who quote 'did what was right in their own eyes'
ended up creating tyranny and chaos,
God, who knows our identity best,
by virtue of being our Creator,
the question is so important that God
saves us from tyranny,
by simply giving us our identity.
It is a gift of God's grace.

To the church in Galatia,

Paul cleans the identity politic slate.

There is neither Jew nor Greek,

there is neither slave nor free man,

there is neither male nor female;

those are not the base of your identity.

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This morning as Paul writes to the church, to us,

you can hear the gift of freedom from the tyranny

of trying to figure out who you are.

He says,

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

In love He predestined us to adoption as children
through Jesus Christ to Himself,
according to the kind intention of His will,
to the praise of the glory of His grace,
which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
In Him we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of His grace
which He lavished on us.

In the love of God,

adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and lavished in grace.

Who are you?

You don't need to figure it out.

God has chosen you.

In love.

To be his child.

That makes you an heir of the kingdom.

Paul says, “You’ve received a deposit on your inheritance,
the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is the seal of your identity,
just like those stamps in the wax
from the past.

You are redeemed.

You are forgiven.

You are the recipient of God’s grace.

You are included in Christ, in the body of Christ.

There is a deposit and a seal guaranteeing it.

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither slave nor free person,
there is neither male nor female;
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Who are you?

You are God’s child.

A brother to Christ, a sister to Christ,

an inheritor of the kingdom
with a seat at the table.

So is that person sitting next to you.

And the person you will see at work or school tomorrow.

And the person you are on the outs with in your family.

And your ex.

And the person holding a different coloured sign than yours.

All are welcomed by God to receive his love.

Who are you?

You are God's child.

So, there you are.

Amen.