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**What Defines You?**  
**1 Peter, 2:9-10, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:10**  
**Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church**

Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am glad you are here today with us. Whether you are in the Sanctuary, in Fellowship Hall, or watching online today, I am happy you are here with us.

Pastor Doug and Jill are away on vacation this week, getting some much-needed rest. Today, I have my parents, Bill and Martha here in the Sanctuary. They have traveled from the great state of Wisconsin. I feel blessed that they are here.

I want to start by asking you simple questions: **What defines you? What makes up your identity?** If somebody asked you about yourself, how would you answer this question?

For most of us, we may begin with sharing about our **profession** - teacher, salesman, electrician, plumber, nurse, or working in landscaping. We may even share about the company we work for, what we do, or even what we enjoy about our job.

For some of us, maybe our first thought was about the **people we love – our family and friends**. We may talk about our spouse or our children. For some of us who are grandparents we may start talking about our grandchildren. We pull up the pictures from our phones of all of our grandchildren. We start talking about how wonderful, outstanding, brilliant, and unbelievably talented each and every one of our grandchildren are. *I have seen several pictures of people's grandchildren in this congregation.*

What is another thing that can define you? **Possessions, Hobbies, and Sports:**

Some **possessions** that we have can define us. For some it would be our house or where we live. For others it could be the clothes we wear. Maybe it's a fishing boat, an antique car, or even a cell phone. We all have possessions that can define us.

What **hobbies** define you? Maybe you are into cooking and all of your friends know you are the best cook. Maybe you enjoy gardening, fishing, hiking, biking, photography, or skiing. These are other things that define us.

Do you know anybody who is **passionate about sports**? Many of us have favorite teams we love like the Boston Red Sox or Patriots and we can find our identity and meaning in associating with our favorite teams. We wear the clothes with our team's logo, watch the games on T.V. and (if we're lucky) go to their stadiums to see them play and to be surrounded by thousands of other like-minded fans. Our moods go up and down depending on our team.

How about **Politics**? Can politics define us? I won't ask anyone here what they believe about politics. Saying you are Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else may define us especially in these politically charged times. What radio stations do you listen to? What paper or websites do you read? The T.V. shows you watch can define who you are and how you think and how you view the world.

In summary, these are just a few ways in which people can define themselves.

Let me ask you: What is one thing that defines us that I have missed? It should probably be the most important thing that defines who we are.

**Our CHRISTIAN FAITH in God should define us, as well.** Our faith in God should be at the core and center of who we are and how we look at things. But for some reason, our faith in God just does not come up as readily as talking about our profession, the people we love, our possessions and hobbies, or even politics.

A few weeks ago, I taught our middle school students about identity, noting that all the ways you describe yourself are important. God did not make us all the same. It is good to have differences: different personalities, different interests, different talents, and different hobbies.

I shared with our middle-schoolers is that our relationship with God is the most important aspect of our identity. It should be our foundation. Everything else should be based upon our faith in Jesus Christ.

This week, I came across a quote from Pastor Eugene Peterson. **“My identity does not begin when I begin to understand myself. There is something previous to what I think about myself, and it is what God thinks of me.”**

I love this quote. If you consider yourself a Christian your identity does not begin with the way you view yourself or what you do or have done or even how other people see you. Your identity first begins with how God thinks about you. It starts with how God sees you!

I want to read a verse that emphasizes how God sees you. It comes from *1 Peter 2:9-10*. **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”**

There is lot in these two verses in the way that God sees each of us. I want to share a few thoughts...

First, God has chosen you! The God of the universe, the God who created all things...God chose you and wants a relationship with you! Whether you realize it or not, you are very special to God.

God says you are part of His royal priesthood, you are part of His Holy Nation. You are part of God's special possession. Just think about how much God loves you!

Second, God looks at each person as special. God values you more highly than any possession you have. Maybe you have a house, a boat, or an automobile that is very special to you. God values you so much more highly than anything you own or have. God values you more than you value your children and grandchildren! God loves and care about you so much more than you can fathom.

Third, it is special being part of God's family. God loves us and accepts us. We are part of God's family. God values each of us. God looks at each person as a unique person with great significance. God invites each of us into His family.

How do we know this? *John 3:16* says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

When you accept Jesus and make him your Savior, you are making Him Lord over your life. **Our** identity changes from ourselves to that of God. We are part of God's family. Jesus is now our foundation. Our focus should change in our lives. We should now focus on God and things above and not so much on earthly things.

### **Point 1: Our identity starts with Jesus Christ.**

One of my favorite movies is “Miracle” which came out in 2004. “Miracle” is the story of Herb Brooks, the coach who led the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team to victory over the powerful and seemingly invincible Soviet squad.

The beginning of the movie starts with Coach Herb Brooks coaching the best college hockey players from across the country. These hockey players all attended different colleges. Some of these colleges, as you might expect, are rivals and these players don't care for each other. Some of the players held grudges from the previous season.

It was up to Coach Herb to make these athletes come together to make them the best team possible as they headed to the Olympics. There was a part in the movie, where the players had to introduce themselves to each other. Coach Herb would say, What is your name? Where are you from? Who do you play for?

Players would say, name... Mark Johnson, I am from Madison, Wisconsin. I play for University of Wisconsin. Each player shared name, where they were from and what college they were from: Minnesota, Wisconsin, BU, Boston College, Minnesota-Duluth to name a few.

The United States was playing an exhibition game against Sweden. The players were not playing as a team. Their focus was not there. They were playing as individuals instead of as a team. The US Team got pounded by Sweden.

The game was over and players were ready to go to the locker room. Coach Herb is disgusted with his team's performance. Coach Herb has the team skate sprints, ice skating to the middle of the rink, then return to the goalie side, then all way down to the other end and back. This goes on for a very, very long time. The ice rink employees want to go home. The coach said he would lock up. Coach would blow the whistle again and again. The players are exhausted and ready to collapse.

Finally, one of the players said, I am "Mike Eruzione, from Winthrop, Mass." Coach Herb said, "Who do play for?" Mike Eruzione said, "I play for the United States of America." Then the coached ended practice and walked off the rink. It was one of the most powerful parts of the movie.

What was Coach Herb trying to teach the players? They needed to come together and be part of one team. Coach Herb said, "You don't play for the name on the back of your jersey. You play for the front of the jersey, which is the United States of America." The players came from different parts of the country but they had one goal. They needed to put their differences behind them and be part of the team working together to achieve success.

As Christians, we are part of the Body of Christ. We come to church to celebrate and honor God. That is very important. Our identity starts with Jesus Christ. As believers we belong to a team which is the church.

As Christians sometimes we can forget that we are part of the same team. We let our differences separate us from each other. Even though we are a part of the church, we divide ourselves. Instead of focusing on the major things we all believe in, sometimes we focus instead on the things that separate us.

### **Which leads me to Point 2: As Christians we are all on the same team!**

I was listening to a podcast of a famous pastor named Rick Warren, a pastor in southern California, who wrote the books "Purpose Driven Life" and "Purpose Driven Church."

In the podcast, **Rick Warren** mentioned this...**"The most pressing issue facing the church today is our "Identity". Christians do not get their primary identity from Jesus or the church. Christians are dividing themselves and getting their identity from politics."**

As Christians we are forgetting what drew us together to begin with. It was our love for God. It was our love for other people, because we realize what God had done for us. Our attitude changed in the way we treated people in society.

Rick Warren shared how Christians have stepped up and started hospitals, orphanages, schools, Red Cross and so many social programs to help people. It was the people of God who showed love to the community and to the people who needed it the most. It was the Christians who cared and loved people that society shunned.

As Christians, we are part of a bigger team. God does not want us to live out our faith by ourselves. God wants us to live our faith with other Christians. As we come to together, we form a bigger team. That bigger team is the church.

I want share with you ***Galatians 3:26-28***. The Apostle Paul needed to remind the early believers that they were part of the same team. ***“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”***

The apostle Paul is reminding the early Christians and the early church of a very important lesson...one that we needed to be reminded of today. We are all children of God through our faith. We are united with Christ Jesus. We are in it together. We are all part of one team! We are part of Jesus’ team.

What if the verse read like this? I am going to paraphrase this verse for today.... “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, neither Red Sox fan nor Yankee fans, neither Patriots fans nor Green Bay Packer Fans, neither Republicans nor Democrats, neither people who were born on Cape Cod nor people who moved to Cape Cod, for you are all ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.

There are a lot of things that can separate us as Christians. Here at Brewster Baptist Church we have a lot of people that call this their church home. There are a lot of different beliefs among people at BBC. There is a wide spectrum of what people believe. We have people with many different views on issues. I would say that is all good.

Despite all these different beliefs, political views, and everything else, we need to remember what draws us together. What draws us together? Our belief in, and need for, Jesus Christ!

What we need to remember is that we are on a journey. Each of us needs Jesus Christ. We are sinners. We make countless mistakes. Yet, Jesus died for our sins. We have taken Jesus Christ

as our Savior and Lord. We need to change from our ways and put Jesus first, to show love toward God and our neighbor.

*Colossians 3:1-2* says, “**Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**”

What we need to remember as the Body of Christ that it ok to have differences. We may see things differently. We may have different preferences. All that is fine. Here is the most important part. As Christians, we are all part of the same team. We are all one in Jesus Christ! That is the most important!

Let me ask you a follow-up question: Why is it so important that we are all on the same team? Why is it so important that we are united with Jesus Christ and that we get our identity from Him? I want us to look to *Ephesians 2:10*: “***For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***”

### **Point 3: God prepared good works for us to do. (Individually and as church)**

God in His infinite wisdom has already prepared for us to do good works. God already knows the problems that we face in our community. God knows the struggles people face individually.

God has already organized the good works that need to be done. He is just looking at us to do it. In these verses, we see that God wants to use you and me to do these works!

God wants to use you to help people in need. God wants to use you to be a listener to a person that needs a listening ear. God wants to use you to cook a meal for somebody in need. God wants to use the person with carpentry skills to bless someone.

I believe God wants to you to use your skill set – to bless a person or a family that needs it.

I just believe that God will use you. But we need to keep our eyes focused on Him. God will bring people to our path to help and support. But if our eyes are focused on ourselves, we will miss the opportunity to bless someone in need. That is why it so important to keep our eyes and heart focused on Jesus Christ.

Lastly, I want to share with you one more story from Peanuts Cartoon:

*Two characters: Lucy and Linus and they are in the living room watching tv...*

*Lucy demanded that Linus change the TV channel and then threatens him with her fist if he doesn’t. “What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” asked Linus*

*“These five fingers,” says Lucy. “Individually they are nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a WEAPON that is terrible to behold.”*

*What channel do you want? Asked Linus.*

*Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that?”*

I share this story because at times I believe there are things we cannot do by ourselves. God calls a team to work together to complete a task at hand. There are some tasks and opportunities that need a lot more people. We must be open to working with other churches or other organizations to get it done.

As I reflect upon Brewster Baptist Church, one of things that I am most proud of is willingness to work with other churches and Christian organizations to make a difference. In the process, we have found out we make more of a difference working as a team.

Think of VBS. A few years ago, Barbara had a vision to partner with other local churches to have VBS. We had a few churches that wanted to join forces. By working together and focusing on what we had in common and what we wanted to accomplish. As a result, VBS reached more kids than ever before. We had more volunteers than ever to lead things. Our community was blessed. God was praised as we taught our children spiritual truths. It took a team approach in doing it. It was no easy task. But was it worth it? YES.

I think of the Holiday Fair. As a church we all come together and pitch in. There is a lot of planning, preparing, and work that needs to be done before the event. People come together and volunteer for one day to raise money. BBC takes in over \$30,000 in one day. What I like best is that we give 100% of that money away. We give it to the community. We give 100% of the proceeds to agencies to help people that need it the most. By BBC raising the money, we are caring for and helping people that are in need.

These are just few ways, that God has used BBC working with other churches and organizations to help people in our community. God has called us to evangelize and to care and love people in our community.

### **Key Points: What defines us?**

**Point 1: Our identity starts with Jesus Christ.**

**Point 2: As Christians we are all on the same team!**

**Point 3: God has good works prepared for us to do.**

Questions for discussion and reflection:

1. What defines you? What are things you usually talk about when people ask you to tell me something about yourself? Do you find it easy or difficult to share your faith with others?
2. How much has your commitment to Jesus Christ and his way of life influenced your values and identity? (A lot, A little, Not as much as I would like, or Not at All) Why?
3. Read *1 Peter 2:9-10*. How does it make you feel to be chosen, royalty, and God's possession? When is it most difficult to remember what God has made you for?
4. Read *Galatians 3:26-28*. What are things that stand out from these verses? How does being "clothed with Christ" eliminate major cultural barriers? Or does it?
5. Often people talk about the differences in the church. Why do you think Paul is emphasizing that we are "one in Christ Jesus"?
6. Read *Colossians 3:1-2*. As Christians what are things we should focus on? Why should we focus on heavenly things versus earthly things? Is that easy or difficult? Why?
7. Read *Ephesians 2:10*. God has prepared good works for us to do. Does that excite you or cause stress to your life? What "good works" can you do this week as an expression of thanks to God for what has done for you.