

**“Redeemed”**  
**Joseph J. Clifford, D. Min.**  
**Text: Colossians 1:11-20**  
**Myers Park Presbyterian Church**  
**November 18, 2018**

This morning we continue our series, “Who am I?” Two weeks ago we affirmed our primary identity as beloved children of God, made in God’s image. Last week we faced the reality that we are broken, yet God does not require us to clean things up before entering into the messiness of our lives. This week, we explore a third aspect of our identity. We are redeemed.

This truth is affirmed in Isaiah 43, which we have just heard. Our New Testament reading comes from Colossians 1. Listen for God’s word to us this day:

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God’s self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Throughout the “Who Am I?” series, we have used a mirror as a metaphor to illustrate the various aspects of our identity. We introduced the mirror two Sunday’s ago in both the Sanctuary and the Celebrate services, placing it by the communion table. The mirror offered an opportunity for you to see your reflection as you came to take communion that day, to see God’s image in your image, and in the image of all those taking communion with you.

Last week, we faced the reality that we are broken by the force of sin that distorts us and this world in which we live. The mirror was featured in a video prior to the sermon. I wanted to break the mirror live, but safety concerns prevented that! The video illustrated the impact of brokenness in our lives as stones symbolizing that force shattered the mirror that had reflected God’s image in us. Guilt, anger, failure, addiction, depression, fear of missing out—these and more distortions of our essential being shatter the image of God within us. We affirmed that God meets us in the mess; that we don’t have to get things cleaned up for God to claim us in love. God loves me; God loves you; God loves us all right here in the midst of the mess.

This past week, we took the broken pieces of those mirrors and brought them back together on the cross. This metaphor asserts the truth of the gospel that God not only meets us in our brokenness, but in Christ God puts us back together again—not as we were, but transformed by God’s love into something new; a new being, a new world, a new creation redeemed by the amazing love of God we see in the cross of Jesus Christ. The writer of Colossians put it this way: “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the

forgiveness of sins...for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... and in him all things hold together.”

Can you imagine? With the broken pieces of our lives and our world, symbolized by the broken pieces of mirror, brought back together through the love of God embodied on the cross, we hoped to create a metaphor to describe our redemption in Christ, for in him all things hold together.

Another illustration of this truth is found in the world of physics. On July 4, 2012, at a press conference at the Large HADron Collider facilities at CERN in Geneva, scientists announced the discovery of the Higgs boson particle. British physicist Peter Higgs had posited the Higgs field and the existence of the Higgs boson thirty years earlier, but his theories had not been proven...until July 4, 2012. Based on what I could glean from various “particle physics for dummies” websites, the Higgs boson is the particle that determines the mass of every other particle in the universe. One blog I read offered this joke: “A Higgs boson walks into a Catholic church. The priest says we don’t allow Higgs boson in here. The Higgs boson says, ‘But without me how can you have mass?’”<sup>1</sup> The Higgs boson is literally the glue that holds the universe together. Its discovery was huge for particle physics, validating what’s called “The Standard Model;” the operating hypothesis of all particle physics.<sup>2</sup>

What the Higgs Boson tells us is that the universe is designed to hold together, not to break apart. That at the most basic building blocks of matter, particles reconcile to one another—protons and electrons, leptons and gravitons and quarks—all held together by the Higgs boson. This has led some to refer to the Higgs boson as “the God particle.”

Almost two thousand years before the discovery of the God Particle, the writer of Colossians described Jesus Christ as the one in whom all things hold together. Long before Peter Higgs posited what would come to be known as the Higgs Field, long before string theory would come to be regarded as “the theory of everything,” the Christian community affirmed that creation was meant to hold together, to be reconciled—all things, all rocks, trees, birds and bees, all people, all the myriad galaxies of this continually expanding universe are held together in Christ. Or as Colossians 1 puts it: “Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Lutheran Pastor Peter Marty offers a simple summary of all this, describing Christ as “the Super Glue” holding us all together.

I’m not trying to turn the Cosmic Christ into a Higgs boson particle, or vice versa. I’m thankful for physics and its ability to help us understand how the universe holds together. Theology seeks to answer a different question. Why does the universe hold together? What does it mean that in Christ, that in the redemption that is ours in Christ, God wills to bring this broken universe together, to reconcile all things to God’s very self?

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Bruce Epperly’s blog entry, “God and the God Particle: a Non-scientific, Joyfully Theological Reflection,” find it here: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2012/07/god-and-the-god-particle-a-non-scientific-joyfully-theological-reflection/>

<sup>2</sup> Clara Moskowitz, “God Particle: Six big consequences of the Higgs boson discovery,” cited here: <http://www.csmonitor.com/Science/2013/0314/God-Particle-Six-big-consequences-of-the-Higgs-boson-discovery>

What does this tell us about God? God is not about division. God is not about breaking us apart. In Christ, God wills for all things to hold together. Religion that seeks to divide us is not consistent with the God in whom all things hold together. It is the destiny of creation to be held together, not to divide, not to break into disparate pieces, not to let the brokenness that too often defines us be the ultimate destiny of our existence. Our destiny is a new creation, a world in which all things hold together, because that is who God is and that is what God wills.

What does it tell us about us? We are redeemed. God's power to heal us is ultimately stronger than all the brokenness that afflicts us. God's love in Christ is ultimately more powerful than the polarizations dividing us. Whether we like it or not, at the most basic building blocks of matter, the universe is reconciled; particles are reconciled to one another—protons and electrons, leptons and gravitons and quarks—all held together. We can choose to live into this reality, or we can keep fighting and dividing and destroying—but all that's a losing effort, because in the end, we are all held together by Christ.

It tells us that the brokenness of our lives and the brokenness of our world do not ultimately define us. The transforming power of God's love in Christ does. We are redeemed. The gospels are filled with stories of this redemption. One that jumps to mind is the parable of the Prodigal Son. You remember, the younger brother who outrageously demands his inheritance before his Father's death, and goes off to the far country and squanders it all and finds himself slopping hogs. In desperation he decides to go home and see if his father will take him back as a hired hand. You remember the Father who runs to welcome him home, and throws him a party. You remember the older brother who resents the Father's grace, who refuses to join the party. You remember the way the Father redeems them both, bringing them together to celebrate the lost being found, to celebrate all things holding together. No matter which brother we might identify with, God's redemption is for us all.

Last week I shared with you about a broken part of my life, that guilt born of circumstances related to my Father and his struggles with alcoholism and mental illness that ultimately took his life. For years I lived in fear of becoming like him. So I distanced myself from him in every way I could think of. He was somewhere left of Gandhi politically, so in college, I joined the Young Republicans. He was a theatre director, so I decided to study aerospace engineering. He abhorred institutional religion, here I am today.

In exploring my family of origin through family systems work, my coach, Larry Matthews, a Baptist pastor from Vienna, VA challenged me to get to know my father as a human being. The only lenses I had to see him were through his wife, and his sisters. Larry encouraged me to connect with some of his friends from high school and college to gain a fuller picture of who he really was. Less than two weeks after that challenge, I received an email from a man named, Don Wildy. He was a friend of my father's in college, and he had come across some old playbills and pictures of my Dad from shows they did together, like "Waiting for Godot," by Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral," and "The Cocktail Party." He reached out to see if I wanted them. Not long after that email, he and a high school friend of my dad's, Ken Hennig, put together a "Life and Times of Dan Clifford" tour in Buffalo, NY. They took me to my dad's old stomping grounds, to the places he put on plays, to eating establishments and watering holes.

On the final night, in the midst of March snow storm in Buffalo, dozens of people who worked with my Dad fifty years earlier at Cradle Beach Camp came together to share stories of their experiences there, working with kids of all races who lived with serious cognitive and physical disabilities. My Dad was the Program Director at Cradle Beach. He hired all those folks to be counselors and staff, including a young

woman, a college student from Denton, Texas who had read about Cradle Beach in a magazine. That was my Mom. They shared amazing memories of that place that was a glimpse of heaven on earth. We sang songs from the camping days. "Good by to the winter, it's cold and stormy blast; hello to the summer and Cradle Beach at last, we'll go swimming, we'll go hiking, o'er the field we'll roam. We're always happy, and never long for home!"

Those were the very best days of my father's life. All of those people's lives had been defined by those summer jobs at Cradle Beach. They were teachers and counselors and physical therapists, and even a priest. My Dad played a huge role in shaping who they would become, and how they would all bless the world. 50 years later, there we were. It was a beautiful night, a night when those broken pieces of my dad's life were brought together to help me see the bigger picture of who he was. It was a night when many things came together, a night when all things held together, a night of redemption for my father, and for me.

The next day as I got on the plane to head home, I thought, "I've got to start working on my sermon." I didn't even know what the passage was for the coming Sunday. It was Luke 15:11-32; the parable of the Prodigal Son. In Christ, all things hold together. It is so easy in our lives to let the brokenness of the past define our present. It is so tempting to let the brokenness of the present define our future. But beloved, brokenness is not our destiny; neither are division and derision. Reconciliation is our destiny. Redemption is our destiny. For Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the cross. In Him, all things hold together; you, me, us, the whole wide world, indeed, the entire cosmos. In him, we all have redemption. Thanks be to God! Amen.