

Good morning and Happy New Year! As Kurt mentioned, my name is Richard Kerry and back in November I transitioned into a role where I serve as the Marriage and Parenting Pastor. It's funny two years ago – my first time to preach from this stage I told you I once called my wife a spoiled brat and she called me a penny pinching miser. So clearly I know everything about marriage and parenting and deserve to be in this role! Seriously though – I am so excited about my new responsibilities – promoting Christ centered families throughout our church. I am privileged to be here with you this morning. Preaching on January 1<sup>st</sup> means my New Year's Eve was really lame – I was in bed by 10. So I am just going to trust that your New Year's was a little more exciting than mine but clearly it wasn't so exciting that you couldn't be here!

As we begin this morning, I want to set your minds at ease. I am not going to be talking to you about things you can do for New Year's Resolutions in order to better yourself, your relationship with the Lord or with each other – those things never work!. I don't want to focus on what you need to do – instead I want to focus this morning on who you are.

Every single one of you have a unique story and your story matters. All of our stories matter. And inside each of your stories are monumental experiences. Some of those experiences have been really positive – really encouraging and enlightening. Others have been really adverse – bringing discouragement, pain and harm. Those experiences have shaped each of your stories, had a significant impact on who you are today and what you believe about yourself going forward.

I had one of those life-changing moments in junior high. No – it wasn't the fact that my voice was still so high pitched that when people called the house and I answered they would say, "Hello, Mrs. Kerry." It wasn't that I was one of the youngest and therefore one of the smallest guys in my class and consequently got picked on from time to time. It wasn't the fact that I made the basketball team and as a result got to date one of the cheerleaders because that's ever junior high boys dream right?

My monumental experience started with a single picture in a single photo album.

In that picture there was a 3 year old boy who served as a ring bearer in my parent's wedding. That boy? Me. I knew that picture existed for a long time but in junior high I started putting things together about how the world worked and came across that picture again. That same day I asked my parents about it.

How could **I** be in **THAT** picture? What I learned later that day changed my life.

I found out that the man I called dad my entire life wasn't my biological father. I found out that my biological father abandoned both my mother and me before I was even born and had nothing to do with me – ever. But I also found out that my dad, Coy Kerry, adopted me at a very young age and raised me as his own.

This was and still is a beautiful story of redemption in my life. But as I look back – my initial reaction to that news wasn't – "Oh my gosh, I have been chosen and adopted! How amazing!" No – unfortunately – as an 11 year old boy I received that story as one of rejection, abandonment, and maybe even more devastating to me – unwanted.

I took those three labels – rejected, abandoned, and unwanted – and unknowingly wore them as nametags for years to come. Those three words became part of my identity.

You see – I had a critical experience that changed what I **believed** about myself and in turn that changed how I **felt** about myself and the world around me. What I believed and felt about myself changed my behavior.

This morning – I know something about each of you – about each of us.

We've all had experiences like that. Some more intense than the one I shared and some less intense. Some didn't occur in an instant but lasted for years. In fact – as I shared my story this morning some of you already had moments popping in your head that were similarly distressing and if you weren't then – you are now!

**Every moment of every event of your life plants something in your soul.** In moments of adversity we often times create what I am going to call a “false identity” or false nametag – a very unhealthy persona.

**In order to identify your false nametag explore your experiences, your thoughts and feelings, and your behavior.**

Think back over the years – my guess is that there are a few moments that jump out at you. Moments or experiences where you know your life was impacted. Times where someone did or said something to you that scarred you or changed how you viewed yourself. It could be the loss of a relationship in the form of a divorce, a break-up, or a death. It could be that you had really unhealthy parents, and therefore you found yourself playing the role of parent at a young age. It could be a moment where you were bullied or picked on. It could be that people close to you were critical, harsh, abusive, or unavailable physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And it could have been as simple as an off-handed comment that cut at your core.

Those critical experiences cause extremely difficult **feelings** and **thoughts** that help dictate the direction of your false identity. Those experiences cause feelings like pain, shame, fear, loneliness, sadness, or anger and those feelings came from some very unpleasant thoughts and beliefs.

Typically – what you'll be able to do is remember your experience, connect with the feelings you sensed as a result of that experience and then ask yourself these questions: What are the beliefs that feed those feelings? What thoughts caused those feelings?

You know that, right? Every feeling you experience is caused by some thought. What we believe has an incredible impact on how we feel. So it's this top down pattern. What we experience causes irrational and devastating thoughts – lies that we believe about ourselves and those lies create these uncomfortable feelings.

That's why we have to explore both our thoughts and feelings. I asked some friends of mine to tell me some of the lies they've believed – lies that have created a false identity for them...and here's what they said...

- I'm not good enough and nothing I do will ever be good enough. All my failures are because I'm not good enough, smart enough, funny enough, good looking enough. Never enough.
- I have to be perfect. I'm not lovable or acceptable. I will ALWAYS be rejected.
- I'm a terrible person. I'm a monster.
- I'm all on my own. I'm always alone.

- I can't trust anyone.
- My sin causes God to love me less.
- I was an accident.
- Success comes from my own strength and ability.
- My struggle with my sexuality defines me.
- How great I am dictates my identity.
- I'm not worthy of love or forgiveness. No one truly loves me.
- Satisfaction, joy, and pleasure can be found outside of God.

These lies devastate us. They tear us apart. They demean us. They're mean. They're harsh. They're the things we wrestle with internally and sometimes have difficulty sharing with others. They're misleading. Here's what I mean...

We take these lies and create nametags for ourselves. These nametags aren't friendly because they're based on lies but we embrace our nametag as TRUE because each experience, each thought, and each feeling have felt very real. My guess is that your nametag might say something like:

- Rejected
- Never enough
  - Pretty
  - Good
  - Athletic
- Passive
- Unworthy or Not Important
- Worthless
- Conditionally loved
- Alone
- Isolated
- Gross
- Fraud
- Monster
- Weak
- Unlovable
- Unlikable
- Hard to deal with
- Fragile
- Broken

My wife and I have been watching the new hit show, This Is Us. There's a character on the show that I resonate with – his name is Randall and he was adopted as a baby. A few episodes ago in an imaginary conversation with his late father – so really he's talking to himself right, he says this, "I've spent my entire life striving for perfection. And do you know why dad? Because I live in fear that if I let up for a moment I'll remember that I'm unwanted - and then what will happen to me?" – Randall

You see what Randall has done? He took his experience of being adopted, experiences fear because of that, puts on the nametag of “Unwanted” and in turn pursues perfection to keep himself from feeling unwanted again.

Our nametags change our behavior. Some of us try to disprove it. We pursue perfection. We work extra hard at work so our boss doesn't disprove of us. We get every answer right in class. We become pleasers in relationships so that everyone is happy. We put on a tough exterior so no one sees that on the inside we feel weak and fragile. We surround ourselves with as many people as possible so that no one will know we feel isolated, alone, and unlovable. These nametags impact how we parent and we even carry them over into our relationship with God.

Others of us just give up and succumb to the power of the name tag. So that if we view ourselves as a monster – we live as monsters. We act ugly, rude, and put people out so they'll see that our nametag fits us. Believe we're never good enough – then why try being good enough. Rejected and unlovable – then we'll isolate ourselves because why would anyone want to be around me.

False Identities hinder us from seeing God the way we should and in turn from seeing ourselves the way God does.

We see this in John 4 with the woman at the well. I don't know her thoughts, beliefs, or full background. But I do know about her actions and her actions tell me a great deal about an identity she had embraced.

When Jesus approaches this woman the first thing she says, “Why are you, a JEWISH MAN, talking to me a SAMARITAN WOMAN?” Right off the bat we see she hasn't just embraced an identity based on her interpersonal experience but on cultural and religious experience. Why are you talking to me Jesus? Why do you want to engage me in conversation?

I wonder if some of your nametags have caused you to ask the same question of God.

Then we find out she's had multiple marriages – five to be exact. In her culture – to say this was frowned upon would be putting it lightly. And then we find out she's in another relationship with a man she's not married to. We don't know her entire story – but I know someone that goes from relationship to relationship like that has had some tough experiences and along the way embraced some really harmful nametags. So what does she do? She embraces it. John tells us that she goes to draw water in the middle of the day. Why is that significant? Women gathered water in the morning and in the evening – and it became a social gathering. Yet here we find this woman at the well in the middle of the day. She's isolating herself. That action alone tells me about her nametag.

You know – I've been this woman. Let me bring back my story for a moment. I found out this really vital and life-changing information in junior high. I remember being angry. I remember being sad and distraught – devastated. That news – that experience rocked my world. It shaped how I viewed myself and how I believed others viewed me. I wouldn't have put these words to it then – but looking back to that moment I believed that being abandoned by my biological father meant I was rejected – unacceptable – and unworthy of the love of a father. Those were the lies I believed and the nametag I chose for myself. So what do I do with that? In some situations I embrace the lie and do nothing. If I perceive or if someone actually rejects me I just say, “Yep – duh. That's me. Richard the

Rejected.” Or I will push people away so they can’t reject me – but then I find myself isolated feeling lonely and that just reinforces the belief that I have been abandoned or unwanted. In other moments I do all I can to make sure NO ONE REJECTS ME – I please and I work hard so that they don’t even have the chance. That’s how all of this connects together and unfortunately – the false identity that I claim for myself sometimes spills over into my relationship with the Lord.

How does Jesus respond to this woman?

He removes each barrier – he gently removes each of her self-given nametags. He confronts her with love and truth and tells her that He’s the Messiah. He’s the One everyone has expected and needed. He’s the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He’s the One who has come for her and others to bring them life – to change their nametags.

Listen – Jesus wants to take every nametag you’ve written for yourself – whoever you think you are – He wants to meet you there and change that name.

We must replace what is true with Truth. Our experiences, our feelings, our nametags are all real and true because we believe them to be and because we have 1<sup>st</sup> hand knowledge of those things. But that doesn’t make them Truth.

**In order for us to be changed – we must exchange our lies for His Truth.** We must take those old nametags and toss them out in exchange for a new nametag. And let’s be honest. We’re not very good at giving ourselves nametags. We’re too fickle with our feelings, too harsh with our thoughts, and too subjective with our experiences. Our identity must be objective and it must come from outside of ourselves. You are NOT what you’ve done or what you’ve experienced. Not saying those things don’t impact you – but they aren’t your identity. You were never intended to embrace an identity based on your actions – you were ONLY intended to embrace an identity based on who God says you are because He loves us more than we love ourselves. Listen, when we try to place the role of God and give ourselves value or identity – we always come up short – always have and always will. We’ve never been able to play God very well. We must let the God of the universe assign us our value and identity.

I told you that I want to focus on who you are in 2017. I want to give you three statements you can claim as Truth this morning that you can know and rely on throughout 2017 – and these Truths will change who you are and how you view yourself in 2017...

**To change your nametag, remember your origin story. Genesis 1:26-27 & 2:7**

Origin stories have a tremendous impact on us. Think about the origin story that our broader culture has embraced. The story goes something like this – a long, long time ago before time began and before anything existed – something happened – there was this cosmic accident where things exploded into existence and motion. And millions and millions of years later – here we are – living and existing as accidents. But with a story like that – there’s no purpose – there’s no absolute truth – there’s no certainties – and there’s certainly no hope for the future. That’s not an identity-giving origin.

But as followers of Christ – we believe we have a completely different origin story and that matters.

Read with me in Genesis. Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.....<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

We believe that an almighty, all-knowing, always present, fully loving, personal God decided to create man and woman and He made them in His image. He made YOU in His image. Before time began – He looked to your birthday and knew all that would have to take place in order to get you here – born with your own will, ambitions, desires, and personality. He knit you in your mother's womb and also knows all of your days going forward.

I love the detail that 2:7 gives us. I can imagine this moment in my mind – where the Lord kneels down and forms man. The language here is that of an artist. God molds and shapes us into form like an artist would do a piece of pottery or a painting. It reminds me of Ephesians when we're told we're His workmanship – His poema – His masterpiece. He grabs the lifeless body of man, picks him up, draws him near, and gently breathes life into his nostrils. God takes what is lifeless and fills it with life – with His own breath. I can imagine a rising and falling of Adam's chest. I can imagine a "thump thump" – "thump thump" as his heart begins to beat. I can imagine the neurons in the brain beginning to fire off – causing thoughts, feelings, and consciousness. It's this really beautiful – really intimate moment of God giving life to us. He adores us as His creation.

Will you do me a favor this morning? Will you close your eyes for a second? Will you just imagine what that moment would have been like if you were Adam? Would you imagine that God has formed your body but has yet to give you life? And then He reaches down and that He pulls you close. And will you imagine that He takes your lifeless body and in an instant breathes life into you? That He causes what was lifeless – to come alive? And that not only did He cause you to come alive – but He has caused you to come alive with worth and value. You're important to Him. Open your eyes.

Your origin story matters – and you must remember it because with it we receive several different nametags.

Loved. Cherished. Made in the Image of God. Valuable. Significant. Masterpiece. Known.

And guess what? I've got good news for you. Everything I had you imagine a moment ago has already been done. Jesus has done that for you. He has given your lifeless bodies life in Him through the work on the Cross and that's the second way to change your nametag in 2017. Remember your identity in Christ.

**To change your nametag, claim your identity in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore if anyone is in Christ (just a quick side-note – that phrase "in Christ" shows up over 100 times in the New Testament), *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. <sup>18</sup> Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of

Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>He made Him who knew no sin to *be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus comes on our behalf to make us right with Him. After our origin story – sin enters the world – it’s passed down from generation to generation – and because of that we are all born into this world with a sin nature and we’re all born into this world in need of a Savior – we’re all born dead with a need for new life. Jesus does for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves – He shows up and restores our relationship with Him. He reconciles us to the Father – breathing life back into our bodies with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus establishes your identity for you. We receive a new identity from the Lover of our Souls – the One present at our creation is the cause of and present at our re-birth.

Brennan Manning – “Our identity rests in God’s relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ.”

He came to make us NEW! We can exchange our old nametags for the one’s Christ gives us. Because when we embrace that newness – when we embrace who we are made in Christ – then we can be ambassadors to the rest of the world – we become ambassadors of these new nametags. We get to teach others what it means to be new – what it means to be chosen – what it means to be fully known and fully loved. Our new nametags – the ones rooted in our new identity in Christ change our behavior.

My 3 year old, Roman, gets this concept. Like most 3 year olds he has a beautiful imagination. He’s constantly coming up with ideas that I would NEVER think of. For example, just three days ago he points at his 12 week old brother and says, “He’s baby Jesus. I’m God.” No idea where he got that.

One of the things he likes to do is dress up. He has a couple of costumes he likes to put on. He has a spider man costume, a fireman costume, and a few other hoodies and things. Every now and then he’ll put on his spider man hoodie that has a flip down mask and he’ll run around shooting spider webs. Other times he takes a different hoodie and only puts the hood on and runs around as a “bad guy.” He’ll even say, “I’m a bad guy!” And he’ll run, jump on you, attack you, bite you and he’ll growl and grunt as he runs around attacking. But other times – and this is my favorite – he likes to play fireman. So if he sees his baby brother in need of something or my wife says, “Roman can you get Rhett’s pacifier for me?” He’ll say, “Hold on mama.” Then he’ll run over – grab his fireman costume – throw on the fireman hat and yell, “Roman to the rescue.” What’s happening here? Roman knows there is a particular way good guys and bad guys operate. He knows that bad guys run around and attack – bringing damage and harm. He knows good guys come to the rescue. He knows that these people have certain identities and with those identities come certain behaviors. He knows the identity he assumes changes him.

Some of you have done the same but you’ve put on costumes with different names. You aren’t just a bad guy but you’ve given yourself a particular name. Damaged. Broken. Useless. Never good enough. Rejected.

But Jesus with His death and resurrection says you are:

- WANTED
- Beloved
- Chosen

- Loved
- Adored
- Accepted
- Restored
- Whole
- Forgiven
- Pure
- Redeemed
- Righteous
- Holy
- Son
- Daughter
- Child

And then he says, now go be an ambassador of these nametags – why? Because this life isn't all there is – there's a life to come and the fate of others hangs in the balance.

Remember your origin story, remember your identity in Christ, and lastly remember your eternal destiny...

### **To change your nametag, know your eternal destiny. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5**

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup>For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup>inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup>For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup>Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

Paul is telling us that being IN CHRIST means we one day will have immortal bodies – that even in death we still win because of what is in store for us in eternity. Paul refers to our earthly bodies as tents. They're temporary. They're not long-lasting structures. And in place of our bodies – our tents – God is going to give us a building – something meant for permanence. So that no matter what comes our way and no matter what our experiences in life have been like – we can rest assured that we have eternity with the Lord awaiting us. We are secure. That might be another nametag you need this morning. Secure. The Holy Spirit is our pledge. We've been promised that this is what is coming our way. **We've been INCLUDED in His plan for eternity. Not just included – but He wants you there!** And in Revelation we're told He will literally give us a new name. How encouraging is that? There are other passages of Scripture that tell us our eternity has been sealed.

When God makes a promise to His people - He always follows through. That's the beauty of finding your identity in Him - it will never change because He's the one upholding it.

There's only one thing left to do this morning. And that's for you to: **Put on a New Nametag.**



Our ushers are going to come forward at this time and begin to disperse our elements for communion. While they do that – pull out your worship guide. In there you have a nametag. What I want you to do this morning – write out a name you need to embrace for 2017. Think about your old nametag and what new nametag you need to wear to replace the old. Write out a name that will bring you life. We'll have a plethora of words on the screen for you to choose from or you can come up with your own. Be transformed this year by the word you choose – by the Truth it provides your life. Take this time to reflect on how the Lord has changed your identity.

Parents – I want you to do this for your children. I want you to pick out a word or phrase in Scripture and speak this over their lives this year. Remember – your “you are’s” for your children will one day become their “I am’s.”

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

Henri Nouwen: “All I want to say to you is, ‘ You are the Beloved,’ and all I hope is that you can hear these words as spoken to you with all the tenderness and force that love can hold. My only desire is to make these words reverberate in every corner of your being – ‘You are the Beloved.’”

I AM...

- Valuable
- Known
- Made in the Image of God
- A Masterpiece
- His Workmanship
- Wanted
- Beloved
- Chosen
- Loved
- Adored
- Accepted
- Restored
- Whole
- Forgiven
- Pure
- Redeemed
- Righteous
- Holy
- Adopted
- A Son of God
- A Daughter of God

Put on a New Name Tag  
Identity

Genesis 1:27-27, 2:7

January 1, 2017  
Richard Kerry

- A Child of God
- Secure
- A Co-heir with Christ