

## THE REAL YOU

**a sermon by Dr. David Palmer, United Methodist Church of Kent, May 6, 2018  
based on Romans 8:9-17; Matthew 16:13-18**

The sermon this morning is a continuation of a sermon series entitled, “Fulfill Your Destiny.” Let us begin with a moment of prayer . . .

We noted at the start of this series how the theme of destiny—a major theme in world religion and world literature—has been lifted up especially in recent years in the Star Wars epic. As people have reflected about destiny, one of the major insights is that your destiny is connected to your identity—who you are gives shape to what your destiny is to be. Thus in the Star Wars epic, Luke Skywalker discovers his destiny as he realizes he is in a line of Jedi who have been guardians of the galaxy through the ages. But what if your identity also includes a dark side? Luke must struggle with this as he discovers that his father took a dark turn in life. So what is Luke’s true identity, and which destiny does he fulfill?

What is our true identity as human beings today? Some people say that we are actually nothing more than advanced animals living in a meaningless world. If that is the case, then our destiny is to soon become dust, and we might as well just try to have a good time before that happens. Others could note that there is a dark side in our past. Human beings through the ages have turned away from goodness and engaged in all kinds of violence and greed and empire building. The Bible speaks of that human turn to the dark side in the story of Adam and Eve, or in more theological terms it speaks of how we are all sinners. So if this is our identity, is our destiny to likewise give in to selfishness and power-grabbing? If you look at the news, it seems that a lot of people are fulfilling that destiny.

But the Bible says that our true identity is to be found not by looking at our sinful past, or by just looking at our physical makeup from the dust of the earth. Our true identity is revealed to us when we look to Christ. Indeed Paul says in Romans, as we have faith in Christ, the Spirit of Christ is within us [*If Christ is in you . . . Romans 8:10*], and “the Spirit,” he says, “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:16-17)

Your true identity, revealed through the Bible and ultimately through Christ, is that you are a child of God with an eternal inheritance. Paul encourages us to lay claim to that identity, which then gives us a completely new picture of what our destiny is.

In the movie, *The Lion King*, there is a great scene in which Simba, a young lion, is wandering in the jungle struggling with his destiny. He was born a prince, the son of the Lion King, but his father was killed, Simba carried a lot of guilt after that, and the old kingdom was now ruled by evil.

*Feeling lost, Simba encounters Rafiki, a mystical baboon, who leads him to a pond. First, it seems that Simba sees only his own reflection in the water. But then he has a vision of his father, who reminds him of his true identity as the child of the King.*

*And the father says to him, "Remember who you are."*

Remember who you are. This is the core of what Paul is telling us in Romans. Remember that you are a child of the King, a child of God. Paul speaks of how we are moved to cry, "Abba, Father." [*When we say "Abba, Father" . . . Romans 8:15*]*—the word "Abba" in the Aramaic language being the familiar word that people used to address their own father. We are to recognize that we are a part of the family of God.*

In that scene from Lion King, when Simba can't see more than his own face in the pond, Rafiki tells him to look harder, and Simba suddenly sees his father's face, as Rafiki says, "He lives in you." Whoever wrote that scene must have been reading Romans, because this is exactly what our passage was saying—that Christ lives inside us, and the Spirit of Christ is speaking to us, telling us we are children of God. [*The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God" (Romans 8:16-17)*] When we hear that voice and take hold of our real identity, then we know what our destiny is. It is to live as children of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, living out God's goodness in the world, and knowing that we are heading toward an eternal future.

This means that in the process of discerning our identity and thus our destiny, it is very important that we listen to the right voice. In the Star Wars epic, as the young Luke Skywalker is struggling to discern his identity and his destiny, he hears voices from multiple directions, some urging him to give in to the Dark Side, and others calling him to connect with the good side of the Force. Today we are bombarded by all sorts of voices, telling us who we are or who we ought to be; but we find our authentic identity and calling as we listen to Christ. A prime example of that can be found in the passage we heard from the gospel of Matthew, where in a crucial scene, Jesus said to Simon, "Blessed are you, Simon . . . and I tell you that you are Peter (which means "rock"), and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:17-18) It is very interesting that Jesus tells Simon that he is a rock and gives him a new name, Peter, meaning rock, when neither Simon nor anyone else around him at this point would have described him as a rock. A rock is solid and unyielding, but this does not seem to describe a guy like Simon, who was at times impulsive, such as when he got out of a boat to try to walk on water and started to sink, and at times inconstant, such as when he vowed never to abandon Jesus and then denied him. But Jesus saw what Simon Peter could become; and indeed as Simon Peter followed Christ, and as he experienced forgiveness and empowerment through Christ, he became the Rock—a key leader upon which the early church was built.

The story of Peter tells us that we find our true identity not by listening simply to what other people think about us or tell us or even by what we may feel about ourselves. We find our identity by listening to the voice of the Spirit of Christ. Then we know our true value and potential as children of God and our destiny to share in the working of God today and to be heirs of God's promises.

This morning we are celebrating Confirmation for nine seventh graders. Some of them were baptized as infants; the others are being baptized this morning. In baptism, we declare a person's identity, very much along the lines of Romans 8—that the one being baptized is a child of God and an heir of God's eternal Kingdom. In Confirmation, young people "confirm" or "say yes" to that identity. It is in essence what we are all called to do—to recognize who we are, to take hold of the grace and the call of Christ, and so to fulfill our destiny as people of God.