

August 12, 2007

Rev. Anne M. Rosebrock

MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SECURITY BREACH

Colossians 2:6-10

In his sermon last week, Rev. Danny Walker shared about a couple who had been married for decades, who had raised their children together, and who addressed each other as “mom” and “dad”. I love that. You may know someone who has done the same.

So much of our identity is wrapped up in relationships and roles in our lives. I am daughter, sister, wife, mother, minister, and friend, not to mention sister-in-law, niece, cousin, etc. We are shaped not only by our relationships with others, but also in roles of our life. I think it was Rush Limbaugh who coined the term “soccer mom”. I was a soccer mom for years. It was not a role I chose for myself, yet there were years when soccer mom did partially apply to me.

You have your roles, I have mine. If asked who we are, we usually rely on those roles and our relationship to others to define ourselves. I am a minister at Meridian Street, Randy’s wife, Martha Anne’s daughter, Lori’s mother. Nothing profound here except that as we take on different roles, as we wear different “hats”, we have every possibility of finding our understanding of self fractured, separated into the various compartments of our daily living. Who you think you are matters, and who you are becoming, well, that is foundational in the way you will live out your days.

Let us pray

Your word calls across the centuries to us, O God. Help us to hear the truth that you offered those who walked thousands of years ago for it is the same truth that continues to speak to us this day. Open our ears, open our hearts, open our minds and above all, open our soul. Amen

Identity theft is a growing issue around the world. Last year alone, over 8 million people in this nation experienced some level of identity intrusion. The actual theft, of course, includes the criminal act of making unauthorized use of a person’s social security number, credit card numbers, bank account information, and/or a person’s name--all leading to the misuse and misrepresentation of private information. Though the internet and computerized data retention has brought many advantages, the downside of illegal access or identity theft has challenged millions of Americans. Typically, the breach of security is within a large organization such as a bank or an internet provider. A computer hacker enters into the system and targets member accounts. Perpetrators of this online crime have cost American companies and the public dearly.

In our culture where we spend much of our time and energy making every effort to secure our lives, our family, our possessions, we have grown anxious in living out our days. Anxiety is high each and every day as we try to stay physically safe. No easy task in a world where the details of terrorism fill the newspapers and newscasts. No easy task in a world where violence is a daily reality. No easy task when our livelihood may be under attack by some

unknown hacker while we sit safely in our home having dinner. We do our best to stay safe. Gated communities, alarms on our cars and our homes, firewalls on our computer all give us a sense of security. It is as if we try to put our lives into a safe deposit box, so that no harm will come to us.

It seems to me though, that we need not experience actual identity theft to find ourselves lost in anxiety and wondering what our purpose is in this world. A shift in relationship or comfortable role may lead to shifts in our understanding of self. We can become lost when a role changes. Confusion easily sets in and we can no longer find our sense of self. For all our worry about our security, for all the threats to our identity, we seem to release our identity because we have not rooted our understanding of self in that which is eternal, rather than that which is temporal.

I am a daughter, I am a wife and mother, I am a minister, but as we journey through life, our roles and relationships change. If we anchor our self worth and our self image in those roles and relationships we will build a life on shifting sand.

“A person’s self image is the mental picture, generally of a kind that is quite resistant to change, that depicts not only details that are potentially available to objective investigation by others (height, weight, hair color, gender, whether or not this person is double-jointed, etc.), but also items that have been learned by that person about himself or herself, either from personal experiences or by internalizing the judgments of others.” Wikipedia

All too often we allow the external to shape us, to define us and when there is a shift in the role, we can become disoriented and lost.

Two years ago, our family moved from Wichita, Kansas back to Indianapolis. I knew that it would be a major transition in our lives. I was nervous that without my professional role in the church, I was going to be adrift in my life. Was that ever true! I shocked myself. I had allowed my “work” to define me. Even though I am in the ministry, even though my days are spent encouraging a life of faith, I myself had become so immersed in my work that I had allowed that role to shape my understanding of who I was instead of setting my anchor deep into my faith. For several months, I had no idea of where I was going or who I was becoming.

As we move through life, our relationships and our roles change and shift. Early in life and early in adulthood we tend to add relationships. In the adding, we find ourselves redefining who we are in relationship with another. Young people in our congregation will be heading off to college in a few days. The freshmen among them will have the task of finding out who they are as they live on their own away from home. Parents will have a similar task as they discover who they are as they experience the absence of their child. As we age, we are forced to discover who we are as the people and roles transition in and out of our life. It is imperative that we set an anchor deep into the love of God to sustain us and to shape us so that we continue to live with confidence in our own sense of self worth.

When my professional life shifted, I got off track, I got lost. No one stole my identity, I released it.

According to author Mike Breaux, “there’s an insidious type of identity theft that robs us of far more than our finances. It impoverishes our soul....” He goes on to clarify four identity thieves that steal our sense of who we are and leave us living our days in a diminished capacity compared to what God envisions for us. Those four thieves include:

“Robbed by relationships” - that is one to think about. Giving so much to another that we lose our sense of self in Christ.

“Mugged by the mirror” – allowing feelings of insecurity to overwhelm us.

“Stolen by success” - our success amounts to little if it has stolen our values, our life, our soul.

“Pick pocketed by the past” - we all have negative tapes that play in the back of our minds, words of judgment, rejection, or failure that threaten to diminish our sense of self worth and our understanding of God’s love for us.

We are not defined externally. Certainly we are impacted by our environment and by our relationships with others, but our ultimate understanding of self comes in relationship with the Divine.

Our challenge is much like that which Paul spoke to in his letter to the Colossians. Paul understood the pressures on the followers of Christ. Pressures that would distract them from their core values, their core understanding of self and distract them from their true identity. He encourages them to root themselves and build up their lives in Christ.

Opening ourselves to transformation means embracing understanding and living the simple truth – Jesus loves you, Jesus loves me.

It becomes clear in the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian’s life is changed, his life is transformed by joy as this one who is seeking becomes convicted and convinced by the love of God. It is the story of the Ethiopian, a rich and powerful man in his kingdom becomes a part of the salvation story. He discovers not only the love of the Divine but in doing so, his own identity. This transformation is more than head knowledge or heart experience, it is soul shaping.

In his baptism, he roots himself and builds his life on the grace of Christ. The Ethiopian opens his heart, his mind, his soul to a new life in Christ. He finds a new identity. His external influences remain the same, but he becomes made new, he knows who he is now as a child of God--a disciple of Christ and no matter what goes on in his life, no matter what relationships change or roles are altered, he is transformed into a new being by God’s unconditional love. We are told that he went on his way rejoicing.

The same is true of us as we live into our baptism. Not only do we rejoice in the love of God, but if we allow, that love will shape us and guide us and inspire us as we live out our days.

Author Max Lucado tells of a time in 1979 when he was on a houseboat off the coast of Miami awaiting Hurricane David. His first inclination is to strap down the boat, to secure it.

We do the same with our life. Strap it down, keep it safe, secure it. Fortunately for Lucado, a seasoned sailor came by and saw what was happening. The sailor said to Lucado, “Tie her to the

land and you'll regret it. Those trees are gonna get eaten by the (hurri)' cane. Your only hope is to anchor it deep."

Great advice for houseboats in hurricanes and for holding onto our true identity. It is in setting the anchor deep in the love of God that we find our hope. It is not in strapping down and attempting to shelter ourselves from life's trauma; it is in setting the anchor deep in our faith that we are able to weather the changes in life.

Rooted and built up! No one can take the identity we anchor in Jesus Christ. No matter what the days may hold for us, the disciples of Christ will weather any storm.

Take a deep breath and imagine setting the anchor so deeply in your faith, that no rejection, no shift in roles, no judgments from the past will be able to shake your certainty as a child of God. Imagine saying goodbye to insecurities, shame, anxiety and fear. Imagine defining yourself by God's unconditional love for you, a love that is with you this day and every day, a love for you that is everlasting.

Scripture offers us wisdom for this day and every day. "Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness." I pray we refuse to release our true identity or to let anyone steal our sense of self from us. The vision for who we are becoming is God's gift! The choice to embrace that gift is yours!