

## “Embracing Your True Self”

First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
January 27, 2019

**Old Testament Lesson:** Psalm 71:16-19

**New Testament Lesson:** Luke 4:16-21, 28-30

A fellow named Carl Coleman was driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars stopped, and the woman driving the other car got out to survey the damage. She was distraught. It was her fault, which she admitted. Worst of all, hers was a new car, less than two days from the showroom. She dreaded facing her husband. Coleman was sympathetic, but he had to ask to exchange license and registration information. She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents .... On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband’s handwriting, were these words: In case of accident, remember, Honey, it’s you I love, not the car.

Thanks to Paul Harvey and his wonderful radio segment titled “For What It’s Worth,” where I found that touching, little story.<sup>1</sup> I shared it with you this morning because it illustrates an important spiritual, life lesson that we will look at during today’s sermon – we get to choose who we are going to be in every situation in life, just like that husband got to choose who he would be if his wife ever wrecked their brand new car.

Choosing who to be in life goes back to the beginning of human existence, ever since God choose us as special among all creation, capable of thought-out, reasonable choices.

Even Jesus was subject to circumstances and choices, during his earthly ministry, when he self-limited his divine knowledge and being to become fully human, entering into ministry among us. All along the way, from his baptism, to his first miracle at Cana, to his greatest miracle at the tomb, Jesus navigated the rocks and shoals of life right alongside us.

In today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus reaches a turning point in his public ministry, a time when he publicly commits to being who he was meant to be, the Messiah!

Just one passage earlier, Jesus has just withstood every possible temptation the devil could throw at him – 40 days and nights in the wilderness. And now he has entered the town of Nazareth, the town where he was brought up as a boy.

Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, stood up to read, unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and proclaimed the following scripture, saying:  
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

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<sup>1</sup> **Paul Harvey, Jr., Paul Harvey’s for What It’s Worth (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 31.**

“And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Jesus is claiming to be the messiah! And the townspeople who watched him grow up, watched his mother wipe his snotty nose – did Jesus get colds? I don’t know, but you get the point - the townspeople were not impressed, at least not in a good way.

“When they heard (Jesus claim to be the messiah, they) were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But (Jesus,) he passed through the midst of them, and went on his way.”

This was a real crossroads for Jesus, a time when he clearly and publicly chose to be who he knew himself to be, no matter what anybody threw at him, no matter what temptation he might face. By overcoming the temptations in the wilderness and any temptation in his hometown – to be less than he was destined to be – Jesus showed himself and more importantly showed us, that in Christ, we have the power to be who we were created to be, day by day, in any and all circumstances.

Today during worship we will ordain, install and commission our new church officers. As these Elders, Deacons and Trustees assume their new roles, they lay claim to their identity as followers of Christ, giving of themselves in every way, and thus fulfilling their ordination vows.

We also will be reaffirming our baptismal vows, or for those not yet baptized, anticipating that important crossroads in your life. During the reaffirmation of our baptismal vows, we will claim again our identity as followers of Christ, ready to give of ourselves in every way, and thus fulfill our calling as a disciple of Jesus, committed to sharing the good news of the gospel, helping others to know the teachings of Christ, and by our fellowship, strengthening the family ties of the household of God.

What I just said – sharing the good news, helping others, strengthening the church – is what you vowed and committed to at any and all baptisms you have ever been at. It’s what we vow to do as we live into the fullness of our own baptisms, with God’s help.

When Jesus passed through the midst of those townspeople hell bent on stripping him of his identity as Lord and Savior, he demonstrated our power and ability, in Christ, to overcome any struggle you’re having, to pass by any temptation you’re facing, to live into the fullness of the person you are called to be.

We each face moments in life, big and small, when we get to choose who we are going to be, who we are going to follow. It’s been that way since the rise of humankind, going all the way back to Garden of Eden, when we choose to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil, in our vain attempt to be more than God created us to be, a vain attempt to be like God. And yet, the truth is, we don’t have to try to be like God. All we have to do is be who God created us to be, nothing more AND nothing less

We each have the choice to live into the fullness of our identity as a child of God, a follower of Christ, a Spirit-filled being in touch with that inner truth and beauty that God – in baptism fashion – placed inside each and every one of us.

Or we can choose to be less than that. It's our choice, a choice each of us must make every moment of every day. Who we choose to be – to become – in this world matters!

We are always choosing who we will be in any situation at hand. By being aware of that, by embracing your power to choose, you can claim your God-given power to pause and make a better choice. Whenever your instinct is to hurt rather than help, to scream rather than settle down, to grab rather than give, to loaf around rather than live life fully, to abandon rather than embrace, you have that choice.

Making the right choice and following through with it is often easier said than done, I know. None of us is perfect. None of us will make the right choice all the time. But the good news is, we don't have to be perfect, just faithful.

As long as we remain faithful to the one who was created perfect, the one who made all the right choices, we can be assured of being enough, of having enough.

Because Jesus Christ – the man, the miracle worker – embraced his true self as fully human, fully God, we have it within ourselves to be all that God created us to be. Because Christ chose to carry the weight of our sin, to overcome the shortfalls of our limitations, to make even our fallen nature right with God, we are free, free to embrace our identity as followers of Christ baptized in the faith; free to live blessed, miraculous lives; free – in the face of all else – to love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbor in Christlike fashion.

Today and everyday, you have that choice, at every moment, in every situation, to embrace your true self, by loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Merciful God, we are bombarded with information, all of it claiming to be the truth.

Yet we know that there are false messiahs among us – those who seek to use and exploit people rather than serve them, those who are after only their own gain, those who distort, twist and stretch the truth to suit their own purposes.

Our public discourse has been reduced to sound bites and internet postings. Our relationships are frequently no deeper than what can be sent in a Facebook message or a 240-character tweet.

In the midst of such shallowness, you come to guide us to deeper truths, richer meanings, everlasting relationships.

Thank you for offering us an ever-flowing fountain brimming with eternal truth. Lead us in drinking from it deeply.

We ask, also, for your presence alongside those who are grieving. Surround them with your love and bathe them in the light of your promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

We pray, too, any suffering from illness or disease, lack of basic necessities, support and encouragement in their daily tasks.

We pray all this in your powerful name, using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**