

“Become Who You Are”

2 Peter 1:1-15

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • February 11, 2018

When my kids were young one of the series of books they really enjoyed reading was *The Boxcar Children*. Chances are you're familiar with the stories. They have been a favorite of children since Gertrude Warner, a first grade teacher, wrote the original story in 1924. *The Boxcar Children* is a story about four orphaned children, Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Bennie. To avoid being split up or sent to an orphanage, the children run away and hide out in the woods where they find an old abandoned box car to live in. Much of the book is about how they survive on their own. An interesting side note, Warner said when the book first came out there were protests by librarians who said the children were having too good a time with no adult supervision. She responded, “that is exactly why children like it.”

The children had never met their grandfather but they were taught to be afraid of him. It turns out that what they believed was not true. Their grandfather was a very kind and generous man who also happens to be very wealthy. In the end the children go to live with their grandfather who actually moves their boxcar to his gardens so they can use it as a playhouse.

The point is this: the children viewed themselves as poor, homeless orphans. And in a sense they were. But at the same time they were also loved, sought members of a wealthy family. It's especially important that their transition from one to the other was not because of anything they had done. They didn't work hard and earn the right to live in a big house with a loving family. It was who they were all along.

Like the Boxcar Children, who you are, the real “you,” isn't determined by anything you've done—good or bad! Peter says, “God's divine power has *granted* to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has *granted* to us his precious and very great promises.”

This is why Jesus came, to deal with our sin, because we can't fix it. You owe God everything, 100 percent of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and any time you give God less than 100 percent you go into debt to Him. But it's impossible to pay back that debt because you will never have any extra. You still owe Him 100 percent. But by the power of the Holy Spirit you “become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” The theological word for this is “justification.” When you are united with Christ, God declares you righteous. This is what is symbolized in baptism. God has set you free from sin and corruption. You're only baptized once because God always gets it right the first time.

However, you don't have to think about it very long to realize that none of us is immune to corrupt sinful desires. So how can the Bible say we are? Often times life feels more like the boxcar children—abandoned, struggling, alone. We call this the “already but not yet” of the Kingdom of God. On one hand we are already set free from sin and death. God has declared it. On the other hand we are still fallen human beings living in a broken world. 1 John 3:2 explains it this way, “we are children of God now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.”

The goal of the Christian life is to become like Jesus. The theological word for this is *sanctification*. It means becoming holy. It's a lifelong process and it's hard work. This is what is symbolized by the Lord's Supper. Every time we take communion we recognize the work God is doing in our lives to help us become more like Jesus.

While justification is entirely God's work and we don't add anything to it, sanctification does require us to work at it. Sanctification is a partnership between you and God. This is where Peter gives us a great plan for spiritual

growth. He says, “make *every effort*.” There’s nothing that deserves your time and effort more than growing in Christlikeness. Peter says, “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.”

Faith, as Hebrews 11 puts it, is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” But faith is not something you can create yourself. It comes from God. Some people say, “you just have to have more faith.” Where exactly do you get that faith? In Ephesians 2:8, Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved *through faith*. And this is not your own doing; it is the *gift of God*.” Thankfully, this whole process of becoming more like Jesus starts when you receive the gift of faith.

“Supplement your faith with virtue.” Virtue is defined as “moral excellence.” In other words, Peter is saying to build upon the faith you’ve been given with high standards for yourself. The first step to becoming like Jesus is to *want* to become like Jesus. He then says to supplement “virtue with knowledge.” If you’re going to become like Jesus you need to know what Jesus is like. That means studying him, learning everything about him, and we do that by reading and studying the Bible. The whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, points us to Jesus, but the Gospels give us eyewitness accounts about what Jesus said and did.

Next we are to supplement our knowledge with self-control. This is where you will begin to see some fruit. As you gain knowledge of how Jesus wants you to live, you will need to actually start living that way. Knowledge should lead to changes in behavior. Remember, self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Self-control should be supplemented with steadfastness or patience. I think the idea here is endurance. Have you ever tried to go on a diet? After two long days of what feels like starving yourself you get on the scale and nothing’s changed. Or worse, it’s gone up a pound. The only thing that really works with dieting is a lifestyle change, changing what and how much you eat. Same thing goes for growing in your faith. The self-control changes

you make will need to be permanent. You have to keep doing it. Patiently.

To steadfastness we add godliness. It’s at this stage that you will begin to experience the biggest change. Where self-control and steadfastness are about not doing the wrong things, godliness is about joyfully wanting to do the right things. Godliness, or reverence, is why we get excited to worship instead of going out of a sense of obligation. In John 15 Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you.” Jesus isn’t saying we can ask for whatever we want, like a new car, and God will give it to us. He’s saying that godliness leads us to ask for the things that will glorify God.

We are then to supplement godliness with brotherly affection. By the way, the Greek word for this is Philadelphia. At this stage your understanding of church changes. You begin to realize that the church is a family rather than an institution. You don’t “go to church,” just like you don’t say you’re going to family. You ARE the church. WE are the church. We’re a family and we demonstrate it by the way we love and treat each other. And it’s important because the world is watching. At one point Jesus’ mother and brothers came to try to take him back home. But they couldn’t get close to Jesus because of the crowd. Some of the people told Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are here.” Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my mother and brother and sister.”

Now we come to the final stage, love. Agape. You hear the word love in our culture a lot. But it rarely means this kind of love. The word agape is used to describe God’s love toward us. Romans 5:8 says, “God shows his love (agape) for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This kind of love is the model for the way we are to love God and others. Agape love is not a feeling, it’s a commitment. It’s sacrificial love with no selfish

motives. It's real love, it's who God is, and it's what you were made for.

God wants you to become who you already are. You are chosen and loved and called by God. It's who you are. God has already said so. But it doesn't always feel that way because, as Peter says in verse 9, we are nearsighted. We

still focus on ourselves. We forget that we have been cleansed from our former sins. But as he reminds us, "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. May it be so.

Amen.