

**REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE**  
**Matthew 3:7-17**

**There's power in remembering who you are.** Marty Johnson was the child of two college students who had a brief affair and gave him up for adoption. As an adult, he wanted to know more about his birth parents, so he started digging through records and he found his birth mother.

Then one day, he gets a letter: "Welcome to the Ogike dynasty!" Turns out his birth father is an African King! And he, Marty Johnson, who grew up in Nebraska, is a Prince – a child of the king.

He flew to Africa, and the people in the village ran out to greet him shouting, "Obiala!" which means, "He has come!" And Marty Johnson, the adopted kid from Nebraska, meets aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and sisters that he didn't know he had—and then, he meets his father, the king, who kneels before him and washes his feet, in a traditional African ceremony of welcome.

*There's power in remembering who you are.*

"Carlos" is a homeless man in Chicago. He's had brain damage, and he can't speak. And he's a ward of the state. He's lived in a state-run facility since 1998. He uses a wheelchair and wears a helmet to avoid injury. And since he can't speak, his normal reaction to people is just to smile and giggle. Giggle and grin, giggle and grin - that's about all he could do

But then on November 29, 2011, something happened. One of the staff members went over to his wheelchair and said the name *Crispin Mareno*. You see, the staff at the care facility had discovered his true identity, and the fact that that day was his 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday. And when he heard that name, Carlos stopped giggling, and he stopped grinning—and hot tears of joy began to flow down his cheeks. Because all of a sudden, he knew who he is, and he knew that other people knew who he is.

*And there's power in remembering who you are.*

**So who are you?** Maybe you think that who you are is *how you look*. Have you heard about the "Am I Pretty or Ugly?" videos? Young girls – teenager and pre-teens – are posting videos of themselves on You Tube and Facebook and asking people to comment on the question, "Am I pretty or ugly?" One of those videos got 4.5 million hits and 114,000 comments that ranged from supportive to horrible. What is that doing to these girls' self-image?

A new study shows that beauty is a \$160 Billion dollar global industry. Women in Manhattan are having surgery to shorten their toes so they can wear stiletto heels. Women in China are have their shinbones broken and then extended with metal rods to

make them taller. Women in Asian countries are having their eyes worked on to look more European

And I don't mean to just pick on women here. In America alone, men spend a billion dollars a year on plastic surgery—not to mention countless hours in the gym trying to get ripped

***Maybe you think that who you are is how you look --but God says something different.***

So who are you? Maybe you think that who you are is *what you DO*—what you accomplish, how you perform – whether you make the grades, or earn the money, or get the recognition...

Sports Illustrated did a story recently about steroid abuse in professional baseball. They interviewed 4 young pitchers who got caught using steroids. One of the pitchers said,

*They don't care if you have character. They don't care if you ruin your life. They only care about performance.*

Another one said,

*I just wanted to get to the major leagues to prove that I could do it. It was not to make millions. I was looking for some kind of personal validation.*

You know, it's heartbreaking to read in the news about students committing suicide because of their grades. One of the most recent was Madison Holloran who was a track star at the University of Pennsylvania. Her first semester at Penn she got a 3.5 GPA. It wasn't good enough for her, and so last January she jumped off the top of a parking deck. She was 19 years old.

Maybe you're working long hours, trying to earn money, trying to excel in sports, trying to make good grades, trying to prove by what you accomplish that you're valuable.

***Maybe you think that who you are is what you do--but God says something different.***

So who are you? Maybe you think that who you are is *what other people think of you*. You have the "disease to please." Your self-image depends on whether other people approve of you, accept you, speak well of you. So you're willing to do almost anything to get people to like you

Or maybe you think that who you are is *what others have done to you*. You've been abused...bullied...neglected, betrayed, or abandoned. And you look at yourself and think, "It must be my fault. There must be something wrong with *me*."

Maybe you think that who you are -- -- is *worthless*. A common name for girls in India is Nakushi. It means “unwanted.” Poor families in India would much rather have boys because they make money and you don’t have to pay for their weddings. So girls are Nakushi – unwanted.

The government is trying to change that, and recently a central Indian district held a re-naming ceremony. 285 girls with names like Nakushi were given beautiful certificates with beautiful new names.

Today, God wants to give you a new name. Or maybe it’s a name you forgot and need to remember. 1 John 3:1 says, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are” (NIV).

LISTEN: Who you are is not how you look, or what you do, or what others think, or what others have done to you. And who you are is most certainly not worthless! Who you are is a child of God.

*And today God has given you a sign to help you remember who you are.*

Carol Fulton is the Director of Children of Zion Outreach Ministries in Winston-Salem. She’s going to be our speaker at our Martin Luther King service next Sunday afternoon. If you’ve ever seen Carole, you know she always wears purple—purple shirt, purple pants, purple shoes, purple sweater. Her checkbook is purple, the pens she writes with are purple—she’s got a purple cover on her iPad.

So one day I asked her, “Carole, what’s with the purple?” She said, “Purple is the color of royalty, and I’m royalty, because I am a child of the King.”

For Carole, purple is sign of who she is.

*And today God is giving you a sign to help you remember who you are.*

In today’s Scripture, Jesus presents himself to be baptized. And if baptism is only about washing away sin, you might wonder why Jesus would need to be baptized. In the movie “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou,” three escaped convicts come across a bunch of people getting baptized in the river. One of the ex-cons, named Delmar, gets all excited and he runs out in the river and gets baptized. Delmar comes out of the water and says, “All my sins and *transmissions* have been washed away! Even that Piggly Wiggly I robbed over in Yazoo – that’s been washed away.” One of the other convicts says, “Delmar, I thought you said you were innocent of those charges!” To which Delmar replies, “I lied – and that’s been washed away, too!”

So if Jesus was without sin, why was he baptized? This is an important question, because this will help you understand your own baptism.

Why was Jesus baptized? Look at Matthew 3:16-17:

*<sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,<sup>[c]</sup> with whom I am well pleased.”*

What we see when Jesus is baptized is IDENTIFICATION. He is identified as the Son of God. God says, “This is my child – that’s *who he is!*”

Now, we have a lot of disagreement about baptism in the church at large. Is it for babies, is it for adults...is it by pouring, is it by immersion?

But here’s the thing: When we look at the baptism of Jesus, I think we see something that happens in every baptism. I believe that in every baptism, God says, “*This is my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*”

Not that baptism by itself saves you—it has to be accompanied by faith, if you’re an adult, or “completed” by faith if you’re an infant (you have to consciously accept for yourself the promises that were spoken over you when you were baptized.)

But I believe that when you’re baptized, even if you’re not sure what’s going on, God reaches out to you, and God claims you, and you are identified as a child of God –

- And THAT is who you are!

In the movie *The Lion King*, Simba is a young lion who’s run away because he’s ashamed. He spends his days hanging out with a meerkat and a warthog singing “Hakuna Matata” (No Worries). Instead of hunting for prey, he just turns over logs and eats grubs.

But then one day, Simba is made to remember who he really is. He looks into a pool of water. And when he looks into the water, he hears his father say, “Remember who you are.” And Simba remembers that who he is, is the son of the King

Today, we’re going to give you a chance to look into *this* water and Remember Who You Are. In just a minute I’ll invite you to come AS YOU FEEL LED (we’re not going to go by rows) and reaffirm your baptism. You can simply touch the water, if you like; if you like, you can put some of the water on your forehead; if you want to, you can make the sign of the cross. And after you go to the font, you’re welcome to kneel and pray if you’d like to.

LISTEN: Who you are is not how you look, or what you do, or what others think, or what others have done to you. And who you are is most certainly not worthless!

Who you are is a child of God. So come to the water, and Remember Who You Are.