

True Identity

Year C, Proper 13 – Colossians 3:1-11

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, July 31, 2016

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Okay, so I really enjoyed the new Star Trek last week. Jenny stayed and went with me, but Trae and Quinton were the only ones that took me up on my invitation. Not quite a youth outing, but I had a great time, anyway.

Though I am not likely to try to squeeze in another Sunday afternoon matinee, (I am very much accustomed to the canonical Say after) this weekend is the release of yet another summer blockbuster, *and* another sequel, *Jason Bourne*, the latest instalment of that now fourteen-year-old movie-story-line. Back in '07 when *The Bourne Ultimatum* came out, it was said to *complete* a trilogy, but I was on record that the franchise was way too profitable to stop at just three episodes. For those that aren't familiar with the movie franchise, or the books on which they are based, the story is about Jason Bourne, a CIA operative who is part of a secret and highly *illegal* cadre of trained assassins. The problem that drives the whole series is that, though he has retained all his mad skills as a spy, Jason has lost the imperative to do as his handlers tell him – along with his memory of who and what he is. The story chronicles his attempts at self-discovery, and the attempts of the bad guys – and they are really “boo, hiss” bad guys – to do him in before he can share his self-discovery with people who would not look kindly on their lethal brand of patriotism. As the story-line has progressed, dear old Jason has spent more and more time, and ever more karate-chopping, gun-shooting, car-chasing energy, trying to understand who he truly is.

Now, it's probably just an occupational hazard, but whenever I'm listening to or reading, or as in case of movies like this, *watching* a good story, I generally end up thinking about what kind of point it makes *theologically*. Yeah, yeah, I know, but you already know I'm a bit of a geek that way. I've been thinking about going to see *Jason Bourne* since I first saw a trailer for it a couple of months ago, but when I started to think about this morning's lessons a couple of *weeks* ago, I got to thinking about poor Jason faced once again with the fact that the life he has lived was *not* the life he was actually *meant* to live, and I shouted, “Ahaa!” Actually, I didn't shout it very loudly – I was sitting at my desk, and that would frighten Judy – but I shouted it nonetheless. Because that is *precisely* the condition, *precisely* the problem to which Paul is referring in the passage this morning to the good people of Colossae.

You see, that is the problem that we *all* face. Right there in the very beginning of Scripture, in chapters one and two of the book of Genesis, we see the story of how God created human beings. I've told you before, depending which chapter you're looking at, I think there are *two* stories about how God created human beings, and that they each tell something different about our relationship to God and to each other, but we can get into all that another time. For now, it suffices to know that Scripture does not spend very much time talking about the human

race operating within the conditions and purposes for which we were created. That's because in chapter *three* of Genesis, the story takes a critical turn as we human beings turn the love with which we were filled by our creation, a love that was meant to be directed toward God and toward one another, we took the freedom of that special gift, and we twisted it around on ourselves.

The rest of Scripture is the story of the trip back, the story of God's trying over and over and over again, to call us back into right relationship – with him *and* with each other. “Through prophets and sages,” the Prayer Book says, he revealed his righteous law, the plan for how we should live as authentic human beings. And in the fullness of time, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to be born for us, to die for us, to rise again that we *too* might have new life, “to open for us the way of freedom and peace.”

Ahaa! There's where Paul picks up in his chatty letter to the struggling believers in Colossae, as he trots out a whole dirty laundry list of ways in which we fail to live into our true selves. We take the gift of faithfulness in heart, mind and body and we twist it into whatever passion pleases the moment. We take the gift of provision of our needs and twist it into greed, piling unused pile upon unused pile, until we end up like the man in today's Gospel lesson – the one with the most toys and nothing to do with them but molder. We have been trained by this world to respond to insult with anger, to injury with wrath, to every inconvenient truth with lies – to each other, and to ourselves. We bite each other in the back, and we spit in each other's' faces – and the only thing that keeps us from devouring each other altogether, is our inability to finish the job, not our lack of appetite. That's not *my* list – look at that passage again. That list has been around a long, *long* time indeed.

But if Christ has died for us, the Apostle says, if whatever debt we owe for our lives has been paid on the Cross of Calvary, “If you have been raised with Christ,” he says, why is it that we so quickly, and so *often* step right back into the shadowy world from which we have been set free? Through the grace and mercy and love of God, in Christ Jesus we can – and we *do* – have victory over the pull of that old life. Not through our own power, but through the power of the One who made us and ever calls us to newness of life, we have been given the chance to look beyond what we *think* are the limits of this earthly life, and to look instead to the glory of our true selves in Christ's resurrection.

So, what's it going to be? Are you going to continue to blindly live as if your eyes have *not* been opened? Are you going to continue to struggle with illusory power and counterfeit love? To be sure, this world, even the non-move-set, comparatively hum-drum world that most of us inhabit, still contains plenty of “boo, hiss” badness that would draw us away from our true selves – Paul's dirty laundry list is, after all, just as real today. Are you going allow yourself to be draw back, drawn deeper, to live another day, another week, another *lifetime* shackled to something less than what you were created to be, a life somehow *less* than fully human? Or will you leave behind the old self that has been crucified with Christ, and find the strength to “set your mind on things that are above,” where your life, Paul says, “is hidden with Christ in God.”

It's a lifelong franchise, and every day, every moment is a new, exciting episode. But in the long-run, we need to, we *can*, renew ourselves in the mercy and the love of Jesus Christ who knows our true selves better than we do ourselves. We need to, we *can*, renew ourselves in the mercy and in the love of Jesus Christ. Because Christ, the Apostle concludes, Christ... “*Christ* – is *all*, and *in* all!”