# SERMON SERIES: LET’S SEE SOME I.D.

**“Powerfully Complete”**

## *Ephesians 3:12-19*

 Today marks the fifth of eight total messages in our sermon series “Let’s See Some I.D.” We’re working our way through the letter of Ephesians in order to get a better, deeper understanding of our identity in Christ. The more we know and embrace our identity in Jesus, the easier it becomes to go into the world as his agents and servants. We find greater confidence—not in ourselves—but in the One whose identity we bear. And when we’re doing it right, the world gets an honest eyeful of what Jesus and his kingdom is like.

 We’ve covered a lot of “identity markers” so far that help to define who we are in Jesus. Let’s go ahead and turn to our Scripture reading for today, Ephesians 3:12-19, and we’ll add a couple more to our list.

 **ASK: Has anyone ever met someone famous?**

 **ASK: Who did you meet and what was that experience like?**

 ***I have a friend who’s a huge fan of the author Stephan King. My friend met Mr. King at a book signing some years ago. My friend had several questions running through his mind that he wanted to ask—questions about characters, details, and influences that had appeared in King’s work. As the line moved my friend closer to the signing table, he grew more and more excited. Finally it was my friend’s turn! He handed his book to Stephen King for his autograph—and promptly forgot every single question he wanted to ask! All my friend was able to get out was “Go Red Sox!” because Stephan King is a big Boston Red Sox fan. Out of all the in-depth, intelligent, and literary comments my friend wanted to make, the best he could do with his moment in the spotlight was “Go Red Sox!”*** ***If you’ve ever met someone famous or important, you know how easy it is to get tongue-tied or overwhelmed. What you’ve always dreamed of saying comes out as a squeaky “Go Red Sox!”***

 Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:12-19, *12Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. 13So please don’t lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.*

*14When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. 18And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*

 The first identity marker we find in this passage is that we have **DIRECT ACCESS TO THE FATHER**. Verse 12: *Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence.* As a result of having been adopted by God and given a place in his family, you and I can go straight to the Father for whatever we need. We approach a loving, patient, tender heavenly Father—not some cosmic genie or feudal lord.

 The Greek grammar of this verse literally means “freedom of speech.” *Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come [with freedom of speech] into God’s presence.* This language refers to being introduced to someone of regal or powerful standing***. If we were to meet the Queen of England or the Pope, we wouldn’t just blurt out whatever was on our mind. If we were to meet the President of the United States—even if we didn’t like him or his policies—courtesy and decorum would require that we choose our words wisely. We couldn’t just say whatever we wanted to.***

 Even though God is far beyond our understanding and is powerful beyond comprehension—even though he is perfectly holy and just—we are able to go to him and say whatever is on our hearts! Because of the work of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit within us, we are not only allowed--but are invited and welcomed!—into the presence of our heavenly Father.

 And this access to the Father isn’t like meeting someone famous. ***If we’ve had the opportunity to meet someone famous, then we know it’s a brief encounter. Perhaps we get an autograph. Maybe we get to ask one question in a workshop or seminar. Perhaps it’s just a handshake. We don’t get to spend a lot of time with the celebrity. Their schedules are too busy, their handlers too preoccupied with getting them to the next thing on the agenda.***

 When we come before the Father we can take our time. God is always ready to sit and listen to us. He never runs out of time or patience. We can take as long as we like in fellowship and communion with him. ***While it may be a thrill to meet Stephan King or Luke Bryan or Andrew Luck or Scarlett Johansen, it’s a fleeting encounter. It has no real substance or connection. But in Jesus we have access to the God of all eternity!***

 The second identity marker we have in this Scripture is that, because of the Holy Spirit in us, we have **GOD’S POWER IN US**. Verse 16: *I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.*

Our identity includes the ability to call upon and access God’s power so that we can mature in our faith, so that we can love God more and more, and so that we are able to love others beyond what we think possible.

Paul wasn’t speaking of having greater self-discipline nor is this “the power of positive thinking.” This was not a personal pep talk, “getting a grip on yourself,” or “turning over a new leaf.” All of these things rely on our own human strength and determination. ***It’s like making a resolution on New Year’s Eve: we make the conscious decision to use our willpower and discipline to effect change in our lives.*** But our willpower and discipline are insufficient to walk in grace, and to love God and others better. Left to our own devices and preferences, our sinful human nature will misdirect us and deceive us.

Through the Holy Spirit, God grants us power to live and do what he has called us to. He gives us access to this power so that he can be known and glorified through us. ***And it’s not a physical power like “leaping tall buildings in a single bound” or defeating Rhonda Rousey in an MMA bout!*** God’s power in us is a spiritual power. It is the power to love the unlovable, to reject bigotry and prejudice, to be generous, to extend grace in every situation, to take the next step in our commitment to Christ. Paul phrased it this way in Philippians 2:13: *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.* And in 2 Peter 1:3 we read *By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.* This is why we can say “no” to sin and temptation: because of God’s power in us. This is why we can fall more in love with Jesus. This is why we can learn to worship more honestly and fully. This is why we can give more, serve more, and love more.

But we must remember that God’s Spirit will not empower unwilling, inattentive vessels. God doesn’t waste his power. He will not share his power with those who persistently reject it. ***This is why we see churches—and individual Christians—living in defeat. It’s why we’ve encountered people who claim to believe in Jesus but are the grouchiest, most hateful, unpleasant people to be around. They lay claim to being Christian but deny or reject God’s power to change them.*** ***If Christ’s indwelling does not transform us, we must question seriously whether Christ is truly present.***

 Finally, our third identity marker from this Scripture passage is found in verse 19: *May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.* Our new identity includes being **COMPLETE IN CHRIST**.

 ***Something is considered complete when nothing further needs to be added to it. A seed is complete. It contains all that is necessary to reproduce life after its own kind. Human beings are complete in our DNA: we have all that is necessary to reproduce life after our own kind.*** To be complete in Christ means we have all that is necessary to reproduce his life in this world. We do not need to add anything extra, like additional rules or specific rituals, in order to be complete. ***That was one problem Paul had to contend with in the early years of the church. Groups of Jewish Christians insisted that the law of Moses must be obeyed in addition to accepting Jesus Christ. The entire letter of Galatians is Paul’s explanation of the sufficiency of Christ.***

We receive this completeness through humility and surrender. It is not something we possess because of our accomplishments or achievements. We aren’t complete because we’re a great preacher or an outstanding student or a diligent employee. We’re not complete because we attend church regularly or give to the needy. We are complete because Christ is at work within us, shaping and reforming us more into his image.

 And just like the seed or our own DNA, you and I possess all that is necessary to reproduce the Christian faith. ***In fact, if you were the last Christian on the planet, you carry all that is essential to relaunch the faith and the church! Through Jesus, God has given us the spiritual DNA to reproduce the life of Christ and the community of the church wherever we are.***

 So let us once again pose the question: “How does God’s Word call, shape, transform, and send us?” How does this Scripture passage today—and these identity markers we’ve discussed—affect the way we live, work, and play?

 We can take heart that the divine Creator of all things desires to spend time with us! He longs to have us speak to him, worship him, and love him. He isn’t some big-shot celebrity or superstar athlete who we can barely approach and never get to know. God is known to us in Jesus Christ; he dwells within us through the Holy Spirit; and he invites us into his presence.

 And when we enter his presence, we receive God’s spiritual power to become more obedient, more effective, more holy disciples. Just like the spiritual blessings we discussed a few weeks ago, God richly bestows his power upon those who truly desire him so we can live out our new identity.

 And we are complete in Christ. There are no other laws or regulations, no other practices or rituals, that we need in order to “get it.” We do not have to jump through man-made hoops. Because of Jesus Christ, you and I have all we need right here, right now—if we will allow ourselves to access it and be transformed by it.

 As we prepare to come to our Lord’s Table this morning, I ask you to consider which of these three components of our identity in Christ that you need to focus on. Do you need to take advantage of your access to the Father more diligently? Do you need more of God’s power for the next step he calls you to in your spiritual journey? Or do you need to accept the completeness you have in Jesus?

 Bring your focus and your need to the sacrament this morning, and encounter the presence of the risen Christ in broken bread and shared cup…