

Sermon 5-12-19
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Based on 1Corinthians 15:1-19

Breathe Identity Into Your Child

Little Ole was explaining to his Grandma how to make toast. First you take some bread, put it on the stove and burn it. Den you take it to da sink and scrape it.

This doesn't say much about little Ole's mother's ability to make toast. But at least little Ole knows how it's done in his family. And that's one of the critical things parenting establishes – who we are, what kind of people we are and what we do. For better or for worse, our mothers established this in us when we were children. Our fathers established this in us when we were teens and older.

Studies show that children will follow their mother to church, but teens will not. However, if their father is a practicing Christian, teens and even young adults will follow their father to church. For they are shown, this is who we are, what kind of people we are and what we do.

Parents are absolutely essential in establishing life identity for young people. Let's take the Amish, for instance. By choice, the Amish live a 19th century lifestyle – no electricity, no automobiles, not even buttons to close their clothing. They use pins. Now, all Amish children are exposed to the wider world around them. Their buggies have to share the road with automobiles. They go into town and purchase various items from stores that have electricity. You would think that the Amish would have died out decades ago. But that is not so. Instead, they are constantly increasing in number. The Amish have large families and retain most of their children as Amish. Demographics show that Holmes County, Ohio in a few years will be the first Amish majority county in the country. That's the power of parental training in identity. It's breathed into Amish kids by their mothers and raised to maturity by their fathers. We're Amish. This is who we are, what kind of people we are and what we do.

In a similar way this is an important statement for Christian mothers and fathers to make to their children. We're Christian. This is who we are. We do this. We don't do that. This is the kind of people we are. That's the formation of Christian identity and character in young people.

The very need for this kind of formation for our children was brought into sharp focus at our Eastern Region meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday of this past week in Napoleon, Ohio. Pastor Jamie Strickler – new to The AALC – was one of our presenters. He's currently serving a congregation in Charleston, West Virginia. As part of his presentation he spoke of the challenges he and his wife are going through raising two teenagers and a pre-teen, two of them girls.

Have you ever heard of Snapchat? It's a mobile phone application that has become extremely popular with teens. The reason is that it supposedly doesn't leave an electronic trail behind you that someone can look up. You send a message to

someone and within ten seconds of their looking at it, it's gone. The same is true with pictures, but you can set how long they will be visible until they disappear, up to 24 hours.

There's a thing called a streak with this application. It's when two people send messages or pictures back and forth to each other during a 24 hour period. Streaks can go on for days, weeks and months. Not breaking a streak is an important thing to teens. So what they do is literally send each other a record of their daily life with this application.

But Snapchat has a dark side. Indeed, you have to certify that you're at least 13 to download this application. The dark side is what is known as sexting – sending pictures of yourself naked or sending pictures of your body parts. Teens think they're safe doing this on Snapchat because it all disappears quickly. However, Snapchat allows the receiver of a text or picture to quickly take a screen shot of the picture before it disappears and save the screen shot. Rightly, Snapchat will tell you who among your friends took a screen shot. But, there are friends and there are friends. So, anything a kid sends stupidly on Snapchat can go out on the internet without their permission and just keep on going. This includes any pornographic pictures they send.

Pastor Strickler told us how there are classmate boys asking his teen daughter to sext them. Also there are boys sexting her unsolicited. He's had to go to the school administration numerous times to put a stop to it. He even had a situation where a 32-year-old man from a neighboring state was sexting her. That was a case for the authorities. His son also is not immune to this. There are girls trying to sext him.

So, consider this. Pastor Strickler is attempting to raise his kids in the midst of a pagan culture. He and his wife are attempting to build Christian identity into their children. We're Christian. We don't do those kinds of things on Snapchat or anywhere else. That's not who we are. And it's difficult in the midst of this pagan culture.

But, the new Christian gentile families of the first century Roman Empire faced the same kind of thing. Remember what archaeology has shown us about Pompeii, the Roman city that was buried in volcanic ash in 79 A.D.? That city was frozen in time, long before the empire adopted Christianity as its official religion in 312 A.D., and subsequently purged its cities of paganism. Therefore, when archaeologists first began to uncover Pompeii in the 1700's, they were shocked to find pornography depicting all kinds of behavior in its paving stones, streetlights, home decorations, even its dinner plates and silverware. This was the culture pagan children were raised in. It was part of their identity, who they were and what they did.

Therefore, when the Apostles began to evangelize and pagan gentiles were first converted to Jesus Christ, they faced a herculean task. First of all, the adults themselves had to take on a new identity. Who and what they were as followers of Jesus Christ was now completely different from who and what they were as pagans. And Paul's letters show that this was no easy task. But what about their kids? They had to instruct them. We're Christians now. This is who we are. This is what we do. We don't do those kinds of things that our pagan neighbors do and say.

The only way this could be done – and we know it can be done, look at the Amish – was to have a firm grip on identity. The early Christians had to know their identity

in Jesus Christ – who they are, what kind of people they are, and how they were to live. Indeed, we heard Jesus say in this morning's gospel, John 10:27-30, "27 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.'" True Christians listen to their Master's voice, follow Him and live according to His teaching. Real Christians create a family and cultural identity apart from the paganism of this world.

So, exactly what caused these ancient pagans to give up their historic culture in favor of an alien way of life based more on the Jewish way of life? What is the power in Christianity that would cause ancient pagans steeped in their hedonistic culture to even consider letting it go to take on a completely new and alien identity in the Jewish Messiah? What would cause them to give up their belief in paganism and its gods in favor of the Creator God – something they had resisted for centuries? It's the proof that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact resurrected from the dead.

Consider carefully what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church in 1Corinthians 15:1-8, "1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also...."

What is Paul's claim about Jesus' resurrection in this passage? It's reliable human history. There were significant witnesses to it. Paul claimed many of these witnesses were still alive when he wrote this letter about 55A.D., about 25 years after the events. Paul himself was a living witness.

By the way, this is where I get the six hundred witnesses from. Notice Jesus appeared to five hundred at one time. Also we know from Acts that there may have been an additional 120 in Jerusalem. Paul himself was a witness of the resurrected Jesus.

And how central is the resurrection to Christianity? Paul went on in 1Corinthians 15:14-19, "14... if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.... 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

Do you see how Paul put everything on the line? If he and the other witnesses were not telling the truth about the resurrection they would be false witnesses about God – liars. That's blasphemy – speaking evil against God.

Now, the enemies of Christianity have long known that the key to demolishing Christianity is demolishing the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead. Therefore, it was no mere coincidence that the re-paganization of Europe and North America in the last hundred years coincided with a severe attack against the historical reliability of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, when I attended seminary in the early 1970's the empty tomb and resurrection of Jesus was considered by many scholars to be a mere fable made up by the Christian community long after the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

But something has happened in the intervening years. A member of my generation, a year younger than me, [Dr. Gary Habermas](#), helped change everything. His personal testimony is that as a young man ready to earn his doctorate in the 1970's he decided to do his dissertation on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the time he was only a borderline Christian fooling around with Buddhism. But, his work on the resurrection brought him to the conclusion that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead in real history.

Now, when you apply to earn a doctorate, a university appoints a committee of professors to guide you. When Dr. Habermas first told his committee that he wanted to do his dissertation on the resurrection of Jesus, the head of the committee said to him after the meeting, "You can do anything you can find evidence for. Just don't try to tell us the resurrection happened because the Bible says so." So, Dr. Habermas obliged him. He went around the problem and in the process developed a method in his doctoral dissertation that he now calls the minimal facts method of biblical scholarship.

For his dissertation Dr. Habermas approached the bible merely as a book of ancient literature. He took the data that the most atheist, skeptical scholars allow as valid historical data from the New Testament and New Testament times. From this data that even the most skeptical agreed upon he concluded that there is enough data to prove that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. His method was so convincing and has withstood criticism so effectively that it is now accepted even by the atheist, skeptical New Testament scholars. This is why a scholar named Bart Ehrmann, probably the foremost atheist/agnostic scholar of this decade, says that one thing he knows from history is that Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection.

There are scholars outside of the specialty of New Testament scholarship who continue to insist that either Jesus didn't exist or He wasn't raised from the dead. But atheist scholars inside the specialty like Ehrmann will tell these people that they don't know what they're talking about.

So, in academia the empty tomb was considered a joke in the 1970's. I remember it well. But today by the normal methods of historical investigation, most scholars consider the empty tomb a very reliable piece information from the ancient world. In the 70's if you had talked about the bodily resurrection of Jesus, all academia would have scoffed. Today, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the prevailing view in academia. Today, even the most skeptical scholars who deny the resurrection will nevertheless admit that Christians have taught from the very beginning of Christianity that Jesus was bodily resurrected – not that He was resurrected (they can't believe that) but that this is what Christians have taught since just after the crucifixion. Skeptical scholars would have denied even this back in the 70's.

So what does this mean for us? Much in Christian identity fell by the wayside with my generation. For the assurance that undergirds the entire Christian enterprise – the resurrection of Jesus – came to be doubted. In fact, Christian identity was falling by the wayside already with our parents, because it might be argued that they were not successful in passing on a Christian identity to us. How did this happen? I would argue that the attack on the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ was clearly a source.

But it's clear now that the attack has been turned back. You don't hear about this in the fake news because the pagans controlling that industry don't want you to know. But the news is that it's possible even in the 21st century to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact raised from the dead.

Therefore, if mothers and fathers are themselves willing to be converted to the historic Christian faith, it is now possible for them to build a Christian identity into their children based on reliable truth. Jesus was crucified in real history. God raised Him from the dead in real history. History will end when He returns for His people. This is our identity. This is who we are. We live as Christians because Jesus was raised from the dead. Therefore, let every Christian mother breathe the identity of Jesus Christ into her precious child. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.