

Our True Identity

Scripture: Exodus 13:17 – 18 and Luke 5:1 – 11

25th Anniversary Service for Nov. 12th, 2023

Let us start with a story: a man had been watching other people receive a promotion. He could not help himself from becoming anxious about his job. He even became envious of the other people. He decided to make an appointment to visit with his boss. The meeting went well and he left the meeting with a feeling that his promotion was soon coming up. Even his friends told him that he deserved a promotion. But after some time in prayer, the man decided to leave his career up to God. He prayed – ‘If this is God’s plan for me, I will do my job well.’

Over a year later, the man got his promotion and his experience while waiting for his promotion enabled him to do his job confidently and it won him the respect of the other employees. Some of the people who were promoted before him were not ready for their promotion. The man realized that God had taken him the ‘long way around’ so that he would be better prepared for his role.

Have you ever taken the long way around?

In our scripture passage from Exodus God led the Israelites out of Egypt the long way around. God chose the long way because the shortcuts through Canaan was fraught with risk. The long way around also gave the people of Israel more time to strengthen themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually for subsequent battles and troubles.

The shortest way is not always the best! Sometimes God lets us take the longer way around in our route of life. Whether it is in our career or other endeavors, God often takes us the long way around so that we will be better prepared for the journey ahead of us. When things do not seem to happen quickly enough, we can trust in God, the One who leads us and guides us. The One who often chooses the long way around for us.

Now, let us listen to our early history here at Bethany Beach. This will be shared by Pat Drizd.

Bethany was founded by members of the Christian Church, also known as the Disciples of Christ of Washington DC area and Pennsylvania. The original idea was not to find a town but to find a suitable tract of land for a permanent yearly seaside assembly for the Christians churches of the country. Bethany still reflects the character of the early settlers who were looking for 'a haven of rest for quiet people!'

The first structure in Bethany Beach was the Tabernacle which was built as a 'camp meeting' place. It is an octagonal auditorium on the assembly grounds of the Christian Missionary Society. It was built in 1901 and was dedicated on July 12th, 1901. It had brown shingles and was 100 feet in diameter with a cupola on top. It lasted 60 years before a storm and termites did her in. That same day the deed to the tabernacle and the surrounding 15 acres was presented to Dr. Power, a representative of the Christian Missionary Society by the Bethany Beach Improvement Company. Problems soon arose. A railroad had been promised but not delivered, water was poor, rains poured into the Auditorium and so the officers of the Bethany Beach Improvement Company were fired. Six business men from Pittsburgh were sent to bail them out. In the fall of 1902, they bought up the company and moved to the Beach and put their stamp on development for years to come. They were W.R. Errett, lawyer; John M. Addy, plumber; W.S. Kidd, steel manufacturer; R. S. Latimer, a tea merchant; Dr. T. E. Cramblet, president of Bethany College in WV; and W. A. Dinker, our first president of the new company.

The trip from Washington DC to Bethany in the old days was brutal. It was a two day dusty and smoky train rides followed by squall tossed boat rides through mosquito infested waterways, and lurching wagon rides over sand and mud with sandy flies everywhere! It was quite amazing that anyone ever returned, but they did!

It was the long way to Bethany Beach's tabernacle!

Due to the moral tone of the religious group that founded the town, every lot sold by the Bethany Beach Improvement Company was to revert to the settlers for 50 years if any of three conditions were violated:

Condition #1 – no intoxicating liquors ever on the sand tract or lots.

Condition #2 – no building shall be built within 10 feet of the lot line.

And Condition #3 – All building shall be kept neatly painted.

Now, let us listen to the history of the Chapel which will be shared by Glenn Chisholm.

Our present Chapel was built in 1963 with no side walls, just screen that could be put up or down during church. The Park next to the church was ask to stop all playing in it during church. The worship services in the Chapel were only seasonal. In October of 1998 the Chapel had it first year round service and it has been doing this since then. The year round church provides religious services for residents of the town and surrounding areas.

A list of all the pastors who have served this congregation since it went year round services is in your bulletin. May God bless each of them and may God bless our interim minister twice at our church Pete Mauer.

Also a list of the moderators of our church since 2003 is in your bulletin. May God bless each of them and may God bless those who are worshiping with us today.

We have shared with you our history but the question we need to answer is – What is our true identity?

Simon Peter had no problem in his younger years to identify his true identity – he was an experienced fisherman. But one dawn morning when Jesus was on the shore and Simon Peter had returned from a long night of very unproductive fishing, Jesus told Simon Peter to push his boat into deep water and ‘let down the nets for a catch.’ Despite a long night of catching nothing, Simon Peter and his crew did what Jesus said and pushed back of the shore and went out a little ways and let their nets down. They caught so many fish, their nets began to break. In fact, his two boats started to sink from the weight of the haul.

Seeing this, Simon Peter fell at knees of Jesus and asked Jesus to go away from him because he was a sinful man. Jesus however knew Simon Peter’s true identity. He told Simon Peter – From now on you will fish for people! Hearing this, Simon Peter left everything and followed Jesus.

In my younger years, I was voted most likely to die in a riot by my friends in my senior class. So I think you can see that I was a rebellious youth. How about you? What was your identity in your younger years?

Has our identity changed since we have been following Jesus? Has your identity changed since you have been following Jesus?

This church for 25 years has been doing year round ministry here in Bethany Beach DE. And over the past 25 years, we have served this community well. And our ministry will continue for 25 more years under the leadership of the person God only knows.

When we follow Jesus, he helps us learn who we are and what we are called to do. When we follow Jesus, he will call us his own and he will guide us to the waters teeming with fish. And our harvest will be overflowing to the point that we will need help to bring the caught in.

When you follow Jesus, he helps you learn who you are and what you are called to do. When you follow Jesus, he will call you his own and he will guide you to the waters teeming with fish. And your harvest will be overflowing to the point that you will need help to bring the caught in.

Let us pray:

Loving God, you know how we feel when things do not seem to happen quickly enough for us. Grant us the patience to trust in you and in your sovereign plan and purpose.

O Father, when we struggle to know our true identity, remind us to follow you to discover in you our true self. AMEN.

Let us now enjoy special music by Bill Holloway, Bill Johnston, and Mary Johnston – ‘The Church’s One Foundation’