

“The Incredibles: Identity Problem”

Acts 9: 1-19

This Sunday, we are taking a look at the film, *The Incredibles*. This film was released in 2004. Yet, thirteen years later, people keep turning to it for entertainment yes, but also for deeper conversations around our true identity. This Pixar film pushes us to answer the questions, “How are we viewed by others? Does this effect how we view ourselves?” These are such basic questions of life.

Questions that we confront each and every moment of our lives. Just think about it.

As humans, we label everything and everyone. Mother, Father, sister, brother, friend, enemy. These labels set boundaries. They define our relationships with others. These labels become the identities which we place upon ourselves. These labeled identities shape how we view ourselves. They influence our purposes and our vocations. They even become how we think we should relate to others...sometimes so much so that we can't think of ourselves in any other way. These labeled identities become who we think we are supposed to be. When in reality, these identities given to us by others make us forget who we are really are.

And that is when the problems start...the self doubt, the peer pressure, the worrying and pleasing of others. When these labeled identities become all we are,

become all we think we are, we limit ourselves. We limit who God created us to be. When we forget who we really are, we limit the potential of becoming the person God calls us to be. And instead, we become something we are not.

Instead, we live with this split personality, disconnected and disoriented, struggling to find our way, struggling to find our foundation. Soon to realize that we become something we were never supposed to be.

Unfortunately for us humans but more unfortunately for us as people of faith, too often in life, we become the very labels given to us by this world. And in doing so, we lose our true identity, which means, in faith terms, we forget the very person God created and calls us to be.

I'm told that as adults we supposedly come to a certain age, when all that labeling of ourselves, you know, the labeling of ourselves by others, us trying to live up to those labels, the crushing disappointment when we fail to live up to those labels, I'm told that supposedly, we all come to a certain age when that really does not matter, when we are comfortable with who we are, maybe even begin to like who we are. I am told that in life, supposedly we all come to a point in age and wisdom when we no longer worry about how others view us but rather, we begin to realize what is important is how we view ourselves.

To be honest, I am not there quite yet. And I would argue most of the world's population is not there either. For the most part, humans have not achieved this freeing enlightenment of identity as of yet. Which is why Pixar's Incredibles is such a perfect movie to help us along the way as we ask and struggle with these identity questions. It challenges us to see beyond our mild-manner alter egos and begin the process of discovering just what makes us super.

So without farther ado, the beginning of the Incredibles....

As you can see, the supers are no longer allowed to save the world. They have been forced to live under their mild-manner alter egos, trying to fit in while denying a crucial piece to their identities. The transition from super to ordinary has not been easy for our main character, Mr. Incredible, now known as Bob Parr. He has not adjusted to this new way of being and is struggling to figure out how to live within this new identity. He doesn't know his purpose. He doesn't know what he is supposed to do. He doesn't know what gives his life meaning. In this new reality, Mr. Incredible does not know who he is or how he fits in.

Which some would say is the complete opposite identity problem that we seem to have as people of faith. Some would argue that we know who we are. We just have forgotten whose we are. Yet, as I have lived with this text this past week, I've come to the conclusion that we can't have one without the other and maybe

that is what we have truly forgotten in our quest to become the people God created and calls us to be.

Or let me say it this way, one time, my spiritual mentor asked me, “Who is Heather beyond the minster? What makes Heather Heather? At first when this person asked me this question, I was angry. I had just spent three years in seminary trying to figure out who I was as a minister and now this person wanted me to forget all that.

My spiritual mentor could tell I was frustrated but she kept on pushing me to think about this question. She wanted me to realize that my calling, my vocation wasn't about the skills I had learned. It wasn't about the knowledge that I had gained from classes. My calling, my vocation, my identity as a person of faith, as a Beloved Child of God doesn't get its meaning from something out there in the world. No, my identity as a person of faith gets its meaning from knowing who I am, from knowing whose I am. My identity as a person of faith, our identity as people of faith gets its meaning from our encounters with the living Christ. It is the core piece that never changes. It is the core piece that this world cannot take away. It is the core piece that shapes our decisions, that shapes our actions. It is what helps us become the person God created and calls us to be.

As we look at our story, we realize that is what happened for Saul. His whole understanding of who he is, of whose he is has changed. Paul now realizes that his true identity is not based upon the labels others put upon him. His identity is not based on who he thinks he is or who is he thinks he is supposed to be. No, nothing like that. Through his encounter with the living Christ, Saul realizes that at this core he is a Beloved Child of God, loved by a God more than he could ever imagine, and called to share this love with others. Now, after his encounter with this life transforming love, Saul realizes that he was limiting his potential. He was being something he was not. He was not living out his call to be God's chosen vessel who goes out and instead of killing and spewing hate, rather now, goes out sharing God's grace and God's love with others. Through his encounter with the living Christ, Saul now realizes his true identity and becomes the person this world needs him to be.

As we all know, Saul has a conversion of sorts on that road to Damascus. He reorients his life. No longer does he seek to capture and kill the disciples of Christ. Now, instead he leaves everything behind and goes out, sharing the Gospel message with others. Saul embraces his call and becomes one of the greatest apostles of the early church, going as far as Rome and Corinth, interacting with Gentiles so that the message of God's love would spread across the world.

Originally as I thought of Paul's story, how he went from Saul to Paul, I thought it was the perfect way for us to talk about our identity as people of faith. After all, he had doubts about what discovering this true identity would mean for him. In fact, others even had doubts about Saul's claiming of his true identity. When Anasis hears the word of who he is supposed to go and help, he turns to Jesus and says, Are you sure we are talking about the same person?

When I chose this text, I thought I had found the perfect way for us to claim our true identity except that as the week went on, I realized that I was only telling part of the story. As we all know, it is never easy letting go of who we think we are supposed to be. It is scary. It is difficult. It is hard work...discovering who we are truly supposed to be, becoming that person God created and calls us to be. If we only look at this story for Saul's transformation, we don't realize that this claiming of his true identity was a journey. It took a long time. And it didn't happen overnight.

It was a process full of ups and downs, hits and misses. Too often when we read Paul's letters, he freely admits to all the times he thought he was getting it right only to realize that he was getting it wrong. Becoming the person God created him and called him to be was not easy for Paul. And it is not easy for us.

It is humbling and disorienting. It strips away all the labels and false identities given to us by others, by ourselves, by the world. It strips away all the things we think we are supposed to be. It changes our way of thinking, no longer valuing ourselves based on what we do or what we own.

Becoming the person God created and calls us to be flips us upside down, taking away our coping mechanisms, leaving us bare so that we have to face the truth about ourselves.

Now this is the part that is scary because we have to find the courage to open our eyes and face the Truth. No one wants to do that. No one likes doing that....but you see, we know something the world doesn't know. We know that as people of faith, we are Beloved Children of God, made in the image of God, and loved more than we will ever know. We know that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We know that who we are and whose we are. We know our true identity so we have the courage and the strength to become the people God created and calls us to be...people saving and transforming the world through God's grace and God's love. Amen.