

In *The Search For Intelligent Life in the Universe*... Lilly Tomlin said:

*I've always wanted to be somebody...  
but now I see I should have been more specific*

*Identity...*

*everyone* wrestles... or *wrestled*... or *will* wrestle *the* question  
*Who am I?*

You could ask one of those old magic eight balls...

Turn it over, and the answer appears in a glass window on the bottom.

Or just Google *Who Am I?*

I did... and found the VisualDNA online quiz

After a few minutes of selecting photos

I had the answer!

I am an Alchemist!

A spontaneous dreamer

who quickly makes out-of-the-ordinary decisions...

I'm an optimist, thoughtful, relaxed, easy going pioneer

I'm a spontaneous, progressive, engaged, leader & dreamer

It made me feel good, sure, but it didn't *really* answer the question

Identity is complicated.

We can't explain ourselves in less than a minute

Favorite foods... music... people... hobbies... entertainment...

Create rich tapestries of being

Even a *fearless* inventory of likes & dislikes won't reveal *true* identity.

You think you know someone... when they do totally unexpected.

Like the Olympic gold medalist in archery...

Who blasted ear splitting rock music before hitting the bulls eye...

Our *true* identity... can be clouded by *perceived* identity

The Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote...

*Oh how good it would be, to see ourselves through the eyes of others...*

Our *true* selves...

This week's gospel reading is all about identity...

*Perceived* identity... *removed* by Jesus... revealing *true* identity...

**Beloved!**

Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee into a land of Gentiles...

no self-respecting Jewish rabbi would ever take his followers there.

Jesus was immediately confronted by a man... *possessed*.

Actually... *more* than possessed... *occupied*.

Because that's what *legions* did

Legions were units of 6,000 roman military soldiers.

This guy wasn't possessed by just one unclean spirit...

His story is tragic.

Chained to keep him under control... he broke free again and again...

Naked... he wandered the tombs... terrifying anyone who came near...

That was *his* identity. That's what people *believed*...

But Jesus knew better... and he cast those demons into a herd of pigs.

And the man's *true* identity was revealed...

The most heartbreaking moment was when Jesus asks the man's name and one of the horde answers, *Legion, for we are many*.

he had no name, no identity left, except for what he is captive to.

It's not Isaac... or John... it's *Legion*.

He was completely defined by his assailants.

by what took his joy and kept him bound,  
Denying him the experience of abundant life.

We're not all that different.  
How often do we define *ourselves...*  
by deficiencies... disappointments... failures...

Why is it that every time we want to take a risk and be vulnerable,  
We're reminded of every failure and disappointment?  
Maybe... it's because we *allow* those things *to possess us*  
We... too... are Legion.

When we say... I am a... *fill in the blank...*  
Music... sports... politics...  
And *allow* that term to define us... We... are Legion

It's hard!  
Advertisements are designed to create *insecurity*.  
They focus on looks... status... possessions... relationships...  
to create a sense of insufficiency  
that can *only* be remedied by what they're selling.  
And far too often we comply.  
Why do we buy all this stuff?  
Because we believed the lie... that we are insufficient.  
We... too... are Legion.

After Jesus healed the man... he immediately sailed away.  
The only thing he did in this land of gentiles  
was heal one possessed man.  
Get rid of his demons and transform him back into a human being...  
a human being who was also *a beloved child of God*.

Jesus didn't just get rid of their problem  
He restored *one of their own*... to wholeness  
If God could do that for their *lowliest*... What could he do *for them*?

Jesus still crosses boundaries to do just that.  
He still comes into our failure-ridden and lack-driven lives  
to cast out our demons.  
Jesus tells us again and again...  
We are more than the sum total of our past failures and disappoints.

We are God's *beloved* children,  
*forgiven* of our sins,  
*healed* of our disappointments,  
and *blessed* with an open future.

No matter how many ads you see... how many criticisms you hear  
You are *not* insufficient *or* undeserving of love.

Jesus' whole point of his existence... is to tell us...  
or rather... *show* us... just how much God loves us.

This story is really about identity.  
The man Jesus encountered lost his identity  
amid a legion of demons... and Jesus gave his identity back to him.

Jesus also gives *us* our identity.  
It's the identity first announced to us at baptism,  
when we were washed with water,  
marked with the cross of Christ,  
and sealed with the Holy Spirit... *forever*.

And so when we lose our identity,  
 when we feel trapped by past hurts  
 or possessed by a culturally-induced sense of lack,  
 we come **back** to church  
 to have those demons cast out... our identity restored...  
 reminded once again... of just how much God loves us.  
 It's an amazing... powerful story  
 because it calls out so many of the lies dumped into our identities  
 and invites us to receive, once again, our God-given identity...  
 a beloved child worthy of love, honor, and respect.

Nowhere is that made clearer than in baptism,  
 when God announces God's unconditional love for us  
 and publically declares us God's beloved children.

So how do we get that to sink in?  
 How do we get to a place where we know it... believe it... own it...  
 How do we get back to the beginning of our walk in faith  
 Back to our baptism

I want to try something a little different this week  
 On the way out of the church today  
 I'd like you to step up to the baptismal font  
 That old historic wooden pedestal and bowl in the back of the church  
 And dip your fingers into that holy water  
 And make the sign of the cross

feel the coolness of God's healing presence on your hand and forehead  
 Say the name of almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit  
 And take ownership in the grace that flows to us through the cross  
 And step into the Florida sunshine renewed... refreshed... resolved...  
 beloved children of God...  
 and tell others what God has done for us.

a song by Casting Crowns resounded in me this week...

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth  
Would care to know my name  
Would care to feel my hurt?

Who am I, that the bright and morning star  
Would choose to light the way  
For my ever wandering heart?

I am a flower quickly fading  
Here today and gone tomorrow  
A wave tossed in the ocean  
A vapor in the wind

Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea  
Would call out through the rain  
And calm the storm in me?  
Not because of who I am

Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin  
Would look on me with love  
And watch me rise again?  
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea  
Would call out through the rain  
And calm the storm in me?

Not because of who I am  
But because of what you've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who you are  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who you are