

***11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but rather Christ is all and is in all.***

Dear Friends in Christ,

Identity theft is a serious problem, affecting 7-10% of the U.S population each year. Essentially, someone steals your identity to make purchases, hack accounts, insert malware, and cause all kinds of devastating problems. Different than stealing your identity is mistaking yours or someone else's identity. Are you familiar with the German word *doppelganger*? Literally, it means "double-goer," but in more recent years has simply been a reference to a person's non-biological "twin."

These *doppelganger*'s are often blamed for varying situations. For example, the employee who went to scare a co-worker. As the co-worker was filling up his water-bottle, the employee creepily whispered, "Boo!" in the co-worker's ear. As the employee walked away, he realized that the man filling his water bottle wasn't the co-worker he intended to scare, but a different co-worker from a different department. They had never met.

Or how about the student who attended a large state college for his bachelor's degree. He briefly worked with a guy called Jeremy, who also went to the same school. Jeremy, apparently, had a *doppelganger* who was also at school with them. On three separate occasions the original student would shout out, "Hey, Jeremy!" only to have the *doppelganger* respond 1) he has no idea who the individual is, and 2) he is not Jeremy. Seeing him for a fourth time, the original student says, "Hey, it's the guy I always call Jeremy! How's it going?" To which the guy gives a confused look and says, "What do you mean "the guy you call Jeremy? I am Jeremy. We used to work together, remember?"<sup>i</sup>

Yes, some of these *doppelganger* situations can be quite humorous, at least to most of us. Though I have to admit that they aren't always funny to everyone. Like the woman, years ago, who sidled up next to me in a video store, put her arm around my waste, held out a movie, and said, "Honey, what do you think of this one?" Clearly, she was not laughing when she looked at me and realized that I wasn't her husband. He was the next person down, and not laughing either, at least not at first.

Interestingly, though, the original idea of a *doppelganger* was not simply a matter of mistaken identity. In fact, the term *doppelganger* has an original idea of being the "apparition of a living person"<sup>ii</sup> - a ghost-double, if you will. It was thought that if a person saw their *doppelganger*, it was an omen of certain and impending death.

For example, in an interview shortly after his second election to the presidency of the United States, Abraham Lincoln admitted that, early in his first term as President, he had seen, on several occasions, a double image of himself in a bedroom mirror. In his own words:

*When I went home I told my wife about it, and a few days after I tried the experiment again, when [with a laugh], sure enough, the thing came again; but I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that, though I once tried very industriously to show it to my wife, who was worried about it somewhat. She thought it was 'a sign' that I was to be elected to a second term of office, and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the last term.<sup>iii</sup>*

My point, today, is neither to tell ghost stories nor to garner a few laughs. Rather, this whole idea of mistaken identity with unexpected, sad, even tragic results, is all tied up, as Paul points out, in our war against our sinful selves. Under inspiration, Paul clears up for us who we *were* by nature, and who we now *are* in Christ, so that there

will be no mistake about our true identity:  
***Christ is all and is in all.***

On February 19, 1851, two men robbed San Francisco dry-goods merchant C.J. Jansen & Company and assaulted the proprietor before making off with \$2,000 in gold coins. The following day, police arrested James “English Jim” Stuart, an infamous Australian career criminal.

Stuart was identified as the robber, but there was one problem: The suspect denied he was James Stuart, calling himself another Australian immigrant named Thomas Berdue.

Authorities refused to believe this story, especially after several witnesses positively identified Berdue as James Stuart. Both Berdue and Stuart just happened to have a small scar over their left eye and an amputated section of their left forefinger.

Since no one believed Berdue’s claims, he stood trial for Stuart’s crimes and received a 14-year sentence for the robbery. But things got even worse for him. James Stuart was also wanted for the murder of a sheriff in nearby Marysville. Berdue was then found guilty of this crime as well and received the death sentence.<sup>iv</sup>

Some weeks ago, in our *Offensive Christianity* Sunday morning Bible Class, we referenced the oft-heard criticism of Christians: We’re so heavenly minded, that we’re of no earthly good. That bears repeating: We’re so heavenly minded, that we’re of no earthly good. As another saying goes, *Do you resemble that remark?*

I think that sometimes, our heads *are* in the clouds. We’re so focused on listening to the Word, or claiming to listen to the Word, that we forget about the rest of the equation. As James writes (1:22), ***Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it.*** If the world can’t see a difference between us as Christians and everyone else, is it any wonder that they write us off as “of no earthly good?” If the jokes from our lips, the worries on our faces, the activities of our hands, the wanderings of our eyes, the priorities of our lives, and the desires of our hearts are no different than the rest of the faithless world, we aren’t an innocent

Thomas Berdue pleading a *doppelganger* case of mistaken identity. We are equally guilty, equally deserving of punishment, equally to be expecting impending and eternal execution.

In Thomas Berdue’s case, the innocent man was freed to a new life when the guilty man was arrested and executed for yet another crime. How different is our story. For in our story, the guilty are freed to a new life, when the innocent God-man, Jesus Christ, was arrested, tried, and executed for *our* crimes. And as he went down to the grave, he took with him not just the sins of the world, but the old sinful selves of the world. As Paul explained earlier in this same letter to the Colossians (2:12), ***You were buried with Christ through baptism.*** Every sinful attitude, activity, and anxiety, every sinful thought, word and deed, *indeed*, every shred of our old sinful selves was pulled down into that grave with Christ Jesus, breaking its hold on you, lifting its weight on you, dismissing its power over you, and beginning anew in you a life of peace, joy, and forgiveness. Again, as Paul wrote to the Colossians (2:13), ***God made you alive with Christ.***

In 2012, a Brazilian car washer named Gilberto Araujo was literally walking down the street, minding his own business, when a guy he knew approached him and said, "Hey, did you know you're dead and your family is going to your funeral?" Araujo patted himself down and said, "I don't actually think I'm dead." His friend said, "There's a coffin and you're in it." Araujo decided maybe he ought to go sort some things out.

According to the BBC, Araujo crashed his own funeral causing people to start screaming and running away. As it turned out, there was actually a body in the coffin, the body of someone who washed cars for a living. It just so happened that the dead car-washing guy looked enough like Gilberto Araujo that Araujo's brother misidentified the body.<sup>v</sup>

In so many ways, we, too have been brought back from the dead through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because he lives, risen

triumphantly from the grave, we too will live a new life forever with him in heaven. But not just *then* in heaven, we get to live a new life *now* in this time of grace before us. As Paul writes in our text, ***Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

You see, as we live our day-to-day lives in this world, we do so in the full knowledge and complete confidence that we are citizens of heaven, the world to come. This is a state of mind and an attitude of the heart that empowers us, through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, to put sin to death in our lives and give a clear witness to our true identity in Jesus. ***So Paul writes, put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> It is because of these things that the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> You too once walked in these things, when you were living in them. But now, you too are to rid yourselves of all of these: wrath, anger, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other since you have put off the old self with its practices, <sup>10</sup> and put on the new self, which is continually being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its Creator.***

When we have our minds on the heavenly, we put to death the worldly, so that the new self can live spiritually, as a witness to the earthly. Let me say that again...Because, you see, God's primary concern us in this world, is not about what he's called you to *do* for your salvation (Christ has done it all for you already). Rather, his primary concern is for who he has called you to *be* in your life of faith, that you, as Peter puts it (1 Peter 2:12), ***Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.***

When authorities arrested Will West in the early 1900s, they checked out his criminal record and decided he needed to be punished extra harshly, because of all his past crimes. The worst part was that he evidently didn't even have the good sense to wait until he was released from prison before reoffending.

Oh, eventually it did occur to someone that the Will West who was already incarcerated at Leavenworth Penitentiary couldn't have possibly been the same guy who had just been sentenced to Leavenworth Penitentiary for additional crimes. He was already-behind-bars! As it turns out, the two men not only shared the same name, they looked nearly identical.

After this case of mistaken identity, it was determined that identifying people based on the way they look and what size pants they wear isn't the best idea. Maybe fingerprinting might be the way to go. And that's one big reason why today you don't have to worry about going to prison for someone else's crime, at least not because of mistaken identity.<sup>vi</sup>

My friends, there is no doubt about your identity. By grace, through faith, in Word and sacrament, you are blessed with a new self each and every day. ***For [you] are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that [you] would walk in them.*** Yes, in Jesus, you are ***God's workmanship*** - heavenly minded for earthly good with his fingerprints all over you. ***Amen.***

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.collegehumor.com/post/7053279/10-embarrassing-cases-of-mistaken-identity>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/doppelganger>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/WAR-NINGS-AND-OMENS-Assassination-of-Abraham-Lincoln>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://listverse.com/2014/05/26/10-weird-and-tragic-cases-of-mistaken-identity/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/24/dead-man-turns-up-funeral-brazil>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.grunge.com/104692/craziest-instances-mistaken-identity/>

