

Selling out for Dandelions
Our Identity in Christ
Romans 8:12-17

A sermon by David Reed for CrossRoads August 10, 2008

Last week Joyce shared about the importance of names. She shared how our “name” defines who we are and how we go about living....

The movie *Blood Diamond* depicts the world of "conflict diamonds" during the political and social turmoil of Sierra Leone's civil war in 1999. Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou), a fisherman of the Mende tribe, and Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) a mercenary-turned-smuggler are on a quest to find a rare pink diamond, each hoping it will change his life.

Solomon had been kidnapped and forced into slavery of the diamond miners. While mining, he found a large, rare pink diamond. He managed to hold it with his toes and asked to be able to go up into the jungle for a bathroom break where he buried the stone. While this was going on Solomon's son, Dia, had been kidnapped and forced into being a child soldier in the horrible world of the civil war funded by the diamond trade.

Solomon had made a deal with Danny that if he helped him to find his son he would show him where the diamond was buried. They had found Dia and in this scene he is with them. Danny and Solomon are at the site where the priceless diamond is buried. There are soldiers hunting them and they are closing in.

Danny tells Solomon, "Keep digging, huh? They'll be here any second." Solomon digs frantically as Danny turns over a dead soldier's body. Danny feels a pain in his side and checks it with his hand. There is blood on his hand; he has been wounded. He tells Solomon, "It had better be there, huh?"

"Yes, yes."

"Have you got it?"

Solomon picks the diamond out of the hole. "Yes, got it. Oh, yes."

Danny looks up and sees Dia pointing a gun at him. Solomon, too, looks up in surprise.

"Dia, what are you doing?" Solomon asks. "Look at me. What are you doing? You are Dia Vandy. Of the proud Mende tribe." Dia points the gun at his father. "You are a good boy who loves soccer and school."

He walks up to Dia. "Your mother loves you so much. She waits by the fire making plantains and red palm oil stew with your sister N'Yanda and the new baby." Tears stream

down the father's cheeks. "The cows wait for you. And Babu, the wild dog who minds no one but you."

Tears are now streaming down Dia's cheeks, too. Solomon continues: "I know they made you do bad things, but you are not a bad boy. I am your father, who loves you. And you will come home with me and be my son again." Dia puts the gun down, and Solomon hugs him.

God knows who we are...our true identity. Sin has tried to kill that person and would succeed but that's not the only end to the story. God call us to look into his face...his face as Jesus ...and hear that sin is not our master and death is not our end, it does not define us or our future...he knows who we are...he knows our names...and calls us to put down sin, to become has made us to be. Our God reclaims our lives through his son. It is God that says "you will come home with me and be my son again". I call you my son.

Romans 8:12-17 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship [adoption]. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are God's children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (see also Ephesians 1;3-6, 18-19)

In this being adopted as God's sons it might seem that I am being insensitive - not politically correct, but Biblically correct - to the women here today. I don't wish it to be that way but, sorry ladies, you have to become symbolically sons too. Let me explain this way...

Tim Keller, in his sermon "The Christian's Happiness said, "Some people are put off by Paul's language of adoption because it's gender insensitive. They argue, "Wouldn't it be better to say that we become sons and daughters of God?" It would, but that misses the whole point. Some time ago, a woman helped me understand this. She was raised in a non-Western family from a very traditional culture. There was only one son in the family, and it was understood in her culture that he would receive most of the family's provisions and honor. In essence, they said, "He's the son; you're just a girl." That's just the way it was.

One day she was studying a passage on adoption in Paul's writings. She suddenly realized that the apostle was making a revolutionary claim. Paul lived in a traditional culture just like she did. He was living in a place where daughters were second-class citizens. When Paul said—out of his own traditional culture—that we are all sons in Christ, he was saying that there are no second-class citizens in God's family [based on gender, economics, status, or even untouchables with diseases]. When you give your life to Christ you receive all the

benefits [that only] a son enjoys in a traditional culture. As a white male, I've never been excluded like that. As a result, I didn't see the sweetness of this welcome. I didn't recognize all the beauty of God's subversive and revolutionary promise that raises us [everyone] to the highest honor by adopting us as his sons.

Our adoption means we are loved like Christ is loved. We are honored like he is honored—every one of us—no matter what. Your circumstances cannot hinder or threaten that promise. In fact, your bad circumstances will only help you understand and even claim the beauty of that promise. The more you live out who you are in Christ, the more you become like him in actuality. ”

Our identity is as a full son of God in Christ. Galatians 3:26-29 (see also 4:1-7). **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ”.** We are covered with him so that when God looks at us he sees not our sin that would cover us but his son.

Our identity in Christ makes us heirs with Christ with an inheritance of eternal life in the kingdom of God which is God’s rule over all for eternity. 1 Peter 1:3-4 **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you...**

What is evident is our identity in Christ is complete not partial. As Joyce said God forgives our sins as far as the east is from the west and our new life and identity in Christ because of that forgiveness through the cross is just as complete.

In January, 2008, a story made the rounds about a 15-year-old girl in Australia named Demi-Lee Brennan. Brennan became the world's first known transplant patient to change blood types from O negative to O positive, taking on the immune system of her organ donor. At first the doctors assumed someone had made a mistake, because it's always been assumed that a change like that can't happen. Now they say she's a "one-in-six-billion miracle."

The blood stem cells in Brennan's new liver invaded her body's bone marrow, taking over her entire immune system. She now has an entirely different kind of blood—blood that welcomes life, rather than carrying death. "It's like my second chance at life," Brennan says.

Something similar happens to us when we believe in and follow Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus, through his blood he gives us that life that welcomes life, rather than carrying death. We are made new with a new chance to live.

God wants us to be 100% sold out on Christ. A complete new creation based on Jesus' gift on the cross and living in and for Jesus alone.

1 Peter 1:13-16 So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives. Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do now. As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. God said, "I am holy; you be holy."

Romans 12:1 Offering ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God

Australian Ian Usher is so disappointed with his current life that he is selling it in an eBay auction beginning June 22, 2008. Usher decided on the auction in an effort to rid himself of all memories of life with his ex-wife. He expects to make at least \$390,000 in a sale that will include a furnished 3-bedroom house, a car, a motorcycle, and a jet ski. He's even throwing in a one-time introduction to all of his friends and a two-week trial run at becoming a permanent employee at the rug store where Usher works (both his friends and his employer have agreed to the terms of the auction).

Usher believes the auction will end on June 29, 2008. "On the day it's all sold," he says, "I intend to walk out of my front door with my wallet in one pocket and my passport in the other [and] nothing else at all." "[I'll] see where life takes me from there. It's time to shed the old and in with the new," he says.

Its pretty sad when your name and identity means so little you'd sell it off to try again. Is it possible to just walk away from pain, Sadness, disappointment, anger, grief, guilt, discouragement, and an underlying sense of purposelessness? I wish it were but I am convinced something must be changed from within rather than just a change of location. My experience has been that it is not that easy to just walk away. That's why Christ's solution is permanent – a new start as a new creation with a renewed identity from a welcome adoption offering a promised life, and full inheritance rights.

Our identity in Christ is as an adopted son or daughter of God, guaranteed with full inheritance rights for eternity. Another part of that identity is that with the adoption comes the family. Look around, like it or not, we all become brothers and sisters in Christ, a family with full family responsibilities and joys and struggles.

As we grew up, how many of us were able to choose our brothers and sisters? It is the same in the body or family of Christ. We have no option to choose for whom God gave his son's life. There's a song that says, "To follow Christ is to lay aside my right to choose whom I will love". As followers of Jesus we must love those who Jesus loves. Since he died for the whole world because of God's love – our job is to love as best we are able (1 John 4:7-12).

Pediatrician David Cerqueira shares a story of how a dying girl showed his church the honor of serving God:

One Sunday my wife had prepared a lesson on being useful. She taught the children that everyone can be useful—that usefulness is serving God, and that doing so is worthy of honor. The kids quietly soaked up my wife's words, and as the lesson ended, there was a short moment of silence. [A little girl named] Sarah spoke up. "Teacher, what can I do? I don't know how do too many useful things."

Not anticipating that kind of response, my wife quickly looked around and spotted an empty flower vase on the windowsill. "Sarah, you can bring in a flower and put it in the vase. That would be a useful thing."

Sarah frowned. "But that's not important."

"It is," replied my wife, "if you are helping someone."

Sure enough, the next Sunday Sarah brought in a dandelion and placed it in the vase. In fact, she continued to do so each week. Without reminders or help, she made sure the vase was filled with a bright yellow flower, Sunday after Sunday. When my wife told our pastor about Sarah's faithfulness, he placed the vase upstairs in the main sanctuary next to the pulpit. That Sunday he gave a sermon on the honor of serving others, using Sarah's vase as an example. The congregation was touched by the message, and the week started on a good note. ...

During that same week I got a call from Sarah's mother. She worried that Sarah seemed to have less energy than usual and that she didn't have an appetite. Offering her some reassurances, I made room in my schedule to see Sarah the following day. After Sarah had a battery of tests and days of examinations, I sat numbly in my office, Sarah's paperwork on my lap. The results were tragic. [She had leukemia.]

On the way home, I stopped to see Sarah's parents so that I could personally give them the sad news. Sarah's genetics and the leukemia that was attacking her small body were a horrible mix. Sitting at their kitchen table, I did my best to explain to Sarah's parents that nothing could be done to save her life. I don't think I have ever had a more difficult conversation than the one that night. ...

Time pressed on. Sarah became confined to bed and to the visits that many people gave her. She lost her smile. She lost most of her weight. And then it came: another telephone call. Sarah's mother asked me to come see her. I dropped everything and ran to the house. There she was, a small bundle that barely moved. After a short examination, I knew that Sarah would soon be leaving this world. I urged her parents to spend as much time as possible with her.

That was a Friday afternoon. On Sunday morning church started as usual. The singing, the sermon—it all seemed meaningless when I thought of Sarah. I felt enveloped in sadness. At the end of the sermon, the pastor suddenly stopped speaking. His eyes wide, he stared at the back of the church with utter amazement. Everyone turned to see what he was looking at. It was Sarah! Her parents had brought her for one last visit. She was bundled in a blanket, a dandelion in one little hand.

She didn't sit in the back row. Instead she slowly walked to the front of the church where her vase still perched by the pulpit. She put her flower in the vase and a piece of paper beside it. Then she returned to her parents. Seeing little Sarah place her flower in the vase for the last time moved everyone. At the end of the service, people gathered around Sarah and her parents, trying to offer as much love and support as possible. I could hardly bear to watch.

Four days later, Sarah died. ...

I wasn't expecting it, but our pastor asked to see me after the funeral. We stood at the cemetery near our cars as people walked past us. In a low voice he said, "Dave, I've got something you ought to see." He pulled out of his pocket the piece of paper that Sarah had left by the vase. Holding it out to me, he said, "You'd better keep this; it may help you in your line of work."

I opened the folded paper to read, in pink crayon, what Sarah had written:

Dear God,

This vase has been the biggest honor of my life.

Sarah

Living sold out for who we are in Christ...the biggest honor of life.

So Why is this message significant at this moment for this part of God's family? The answer comes as another question - Why is it that suddenly we are part of and have been a part of the lives of several people struggling with cancer? There are things that come along and seem to threaten our sonship, our inheritance and family in Christ. We need to be reminded of our identities in Christ that nothing can harm or tarnish or diminish.

Romans 8:38-39 I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. (see also 1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

This message - that all who believe and follow Jesus are adopted as his children, and given the eternal inheritance as his true sons and daughters who as one family in Christ, live united in a spirit of adoption - through all life and death, hardship, persecution, abandonment, addiction, affliction, famine, this message is so very deeply significant in a world that has truly forgotten who they are, who they belong to and what their purpose is...and who face real threats...I would never say what our sisters are facing are not real but these threats can not threaten who they are in Christ nor what they have been promised in him. This living, this selling out for Jesus and the honor of serving God is so vital, so important in this world that lives without Christ. May their struggles remind them and may they live even today as sold out for dandelions.

In the article "Leading by Naming," Mark Labberton speaks of the power names carry:

Every day our naming of the people around us gives life and/or takes it away. ...

I can still feel the impact of a highly musical friend who one day called me musical. No one had ever called me that. I didn't really play an instrument. I was no soloist.

Yet what made this comment so remarkable was that I instantly felt known and loved. Why? Because I was being named in the way that always matters most: from the inside out.

The musicality of my life, fundamental and invisible as it is, has to do with my soul, not with instruments. It's about my way of being in the world, not about notes being played. The sheer, unexpected grace of being named "musical" stunned me. It's not the most important thing about me, but he "got me" in a way that noticed, validated, and appreciated something deeply true about me even though it is usually missed. Being rightly named means being truly known. It changes our lives. ...

Dalits ("Untouchables") in India are required by Hindu law to be given one name, and it must be derogatory: Ugly, Dung, Stupid, . Imagine the transformation when they discover that, in Jesus, God came as a dalit ... and that he has the power to rename them: Chosen. Holy. Beloved.

If there is a terror about darkness because we cannot see, there is also a terror about light because we can see. There is a terror about light because much of what we see in the light about ourselves and our world we would rather not see, would rather not have been seen.

— Frederick Buechner, U. S. writer and preacher (1926–)

Seatbelts can be a hassle. Some people just don't want to be bothered even when the law requires them to buckle up. According to the Associated Press, a New Zealander named Ivan Segedin took it to an extreme. The police ticketed him 32 times over five years for failing to use his seat belt. Even though this was costing him big money, Segedin refused to buckle up. Finally, instead of obeying the law, the man decided to rely on deception. He made a fake seat belt that would hang over his shoulder and make it appear that he was wearing a seat belt when he was not.

His trick worked for a while. Then, he had a head-on collision. He was thrown forward onto the steering wheel and killed.

Discussing the accident, the coroner described the fake seat belt: "Though his car was fitted with seat belts, an extra belt with a long strap had been knotted above the seat belt on the driver's side, providing a belt to simply sit over the driver's shoulder."

When truly tested, what is fake won't hold up when you need it most.