**6 Pentecost, July 20, 2014, Gen 28:10-19; Ps 139; Rom 8:12-25; Matt 13:24-43; Rev Mary S Trainor**

My mother, who is 98, was of the generation who identified men by their profession and women by the profession of their husbands. That is just the way it was -- and still is for her. For example, she would say, "**Harry the electrician and business owner"**  instead of, "**Harry is the nice guy who lives on 5th St and who is really strong."** This always bothered me, because I value who a person is more than what profession a person has. Yet, both profession and attributes are part of a person's identity.

Our "identity" is who we are and how we see ourselves. Figuring out our identity is a challenge that we all face. As adolescents, we try to distinguish ourselves from our parents and our siblings. As adults, we try to live into who we think we are or think we want to be. Things happen to us along the way, like people saying things that hurt us, and this makes us question who we think we are. In midlife, we often realize that we are not succeeding in becoming who we had hoped to become. In the golden years, some make amends for how they had been before. Ah, identity. It is important. Today's Scriptures inform our identities in several ways.

In our Old Testament lesson Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebekah, is picking a spot to camp. In the night (with his head on a stone pillow) he dreamt about a ladder to heaven and woke to see God next to him saying, "***all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.***" Wow. A big deal! So after that moment of encountering the living God, life changed for Jacob, his understanding of his essence, role and purpose became clear: his identity was transformed. Through Baptism and Holy Eucharist, we have a direct encounter with the living Christ and we too are transformed. Because of the real presence of God entering us, we become new creations in Christ. Our identity changes (just as Jacob's did) by our encounter and blessing by the living God. Author and minister Leighton Ford said, "**God loves us the way we are, but too much to leave us that way."** So, when asked about our identity we say that we are God's own, transformed.

Our next reading, from Psalm 139, speaks to our identity in a different way. In the Psalm, we see that God already knows who we are inside and out-there is nothing to hide! And, He loves us anyway, in spite of what He sees - pretty wonderful! The Psalm says, "***Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up you discern my thoughts from afar...and are acquainted with all my ways."*** God is with us all along, no matter where we are, "***If I climb up to heaven, you are there."*** We are God's masterpiece; two verses from the Psalm that were left out in today's insert, verses 13 and 14, say this, "***For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.4I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*** The Psalm ends with "***lead me in the way that is everlasting***." It is popular to have a "muse" or "guru" -- we each have our own muse or guru -- it is the living God, the living God who leads us in the way!

Ok, so our identity thusfar is that we are God's own, He loves us, we are transformed by God, God is our constant companion, and God guides us -- whew, lots of important stuff that normally does not make the list of our characteristics! And, we are not done! When we rattle off our attributes, do we list "***adopted child of God***" as one of them? Probably not, and yet we should. Paul, in our Romans reading today, speaks of our identity as adopted children of God. This is not a small deal, for because we are God's children we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We are told, "***the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.***" Being God's child is an important part of our identity.

Living into our identity is, of course, a challenge. And Paul wraps up today's passage with the answer: hope. "***In hope we were saved***." Hope is not some dead word, hope in God is alive and here. Hope is confident expectation in God's provision. Hope is about God helping us live the identity that He has in mind for us. This is what Jacob felt after experiencing God on his night of camping; this is what we experience each week when we receive Holy Communion. This is what we know when we claim our identity as children of God. When we go through our tough times and challenges and temptations, Jesus says we are to cry, "***Abba! Father! it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit."*** This is way better than winning the big jackpot for the Powerball lottery. This is way better then living in the finest house or driving the fanciest new car. The word "abba" is an Aramaic word that means "daddy." Crying out to "Abba" signifies an intimate, confident, trust-based, hope-filled, close relationship.

Jesus also has something to say about our identity, in today's Gospel parable of the wheat and the weeds. It reminds me of the 1966 Clint Eastwood movie, "**The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**" for this is the world that we live in. In the parable, Jesus says that in our world all kinds of people will live together side by side, the good and the bad and everything in between. And, in spite of our natural tendency to judge others, Jesus tells us that we are not very good at distinguishing the good from the bad. It's a little like asking a young child to go and weed your garden, and the child happily comes back with your tomato and bean plans in her hand and the crab grass and dandelions are left to grow. What Jesus is saying here is that it is NOT part of our identity to judge others, that is His job. He will do the sorting "at the end of the age," so we needn't do that. We have plenty to do keeping track of our own lives, living into the identity that God has planned for us.

Are you living your identity as a person who has been transformed by the living God, who is God's adopted child and heir to the Kingdom, who is known through and through by God and is led by Him, who cries out "abba" when in need? I pray that you will live into this identity beginning today. Amen.