

Series a

171119

Unashamed Series

**UNASHAMED – IDENTITY**  
**LUKE 15:11-24**

As one of Jesus' disciples.  
As a Christian.  
As a follower of Jesus.  
As a child of God.

Our Heavenly Father.  
Is constantly calling us.  
From the things that keep us.  
From experiencing the abundant life that Jesus promised.

And few things.  
Keep us from living abundant life.  
Like shame does.

And so.  
Throughout this **UNASHAMED SERIES**.  
I want to proclaim the Good News.  
The Gospel.  
That in Jesus' life.  
Death.  
And resurrection.  
God overcomes shame.  
So we can live unashamed.  
Experiencing life to the full.

Let's do a quick review of what we've learned so far.

We've learned.  
The difference between **guilt** and **shame**.

**Guilt** is feeling bad about our behaviour.

**Shame** is feeling bad about our being.

**Guilt** says.  
*"I've done something bad."*

**Shame** says.  
*"I am bad."*

**Shame** causes us to hide from God.  
And from one another.

We wear "**masks**".  
Hoping that others won't see the truth about us.

**Shame** destroys the intimacy that we were created for.  
**Shame** keeps us living into shallow relationships.

In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.  
We learn that God doesn't condemn us for our failure.

**But...**  
Welcomes us with love and forgiveness.

Today I want to add one more critical piece to that list.  
**Shame** is rooted in a distortion of our identity.

Let me say that again.  
**Shame** is rooted in a distortion of our identity.

We all suffer from a case of mistaken identity.

Put another way.

We forget who we really are.

This is true for all of us.  
And it's a theme that's reflected in popular books and movies.

The ugly duckling is really a beautiful swan.

Harry Potter isn't just a boy who sleeps in the cupboard under the stairs.  
He's the chosen one.

Neo from the Matrix isn't just a hacker.  
Like Harry Potter.  
He, too, is the chosen one.

And you and I.  
Are not just worthless sinners.  
We're beloved children of God.

To dig more deeply into this theme let's look at that great story just read for us.

**The Parable of the Prodigal Son.**

I want to draw your attention to the pattern of his story.  
Because like so many other stories in Scripture.  
This is our story.  
This is a pattern that we live.

Pay attention to the Prodigal Son's sense of identity.

At the start of the story.  
The Prodigal Son knows who he is.  
He's the beloved son of his father.  
He's a full member of the family.  
He's an heir to the family fortune.

He didn't earn this identity.

He didn't work to achieve it.  
It is simply his birthright.

But then the boy gets restless.  
He wants to see the world.  
He wants to experience new things.  
Because we all know.  
That the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

And we all know.  
How that works out for him.

He makes a series of bad choices.  
Winds up broke.  
And broken.

For Jews.  
Who saw pigs as unclean animals.  
You just can't get much lower.  
Than feeding pigs for a living.

And there.  
In the pigsty.  
The shit and mud.  
The boy experiences both guilt and shame.

He's sorry for the bad choices he has made.  
That's **GUILT**.

And he assumes a mistaken identity.  
He sees himself a slave.  
Unworthy to be a son.  
That's **SHAME**.

And then he goes back home.  
Back where he started.

In his guilt and shame.  
He offers himself up as a slave in his father's house.

It's the best he can hope for.  
Because guilt and shame.  
Rob him of any real hope.

But what he receives is stunning.

Not the back of his father's hand.  
But the full-bodied.  
Whole-hearted.  
Embrace of his father.

And he receives gifts.  
Each with deep meaning.

His father gives him sandals for his feet.  
Because only slaves went barefoot.

The boy was given the best robe.  
A sign of his father's love and favour.

And he's given a ring.  
A signet ring.  
A sign of his full status as a member of the household.

And not only that.  
But a signet ring served as a credit card in Jesus' day.

All this.  
For the boy who willingly.  
And wilfully.  
Squandered his entire inheritance.

And then.

To top it all off.  
The words he couldn't imagine ever hearing again....  
***"Child."***  
***"Son."***  
***"Daughter."***

It's an amazing story.  
And one we should recognize.  
**Because.**  
**It's our story.**

We all start at home.  
Here in the waters of Baptism.

Here we are given a name.  
Our true identity.  
**Beloved child of God.**

Long before we could ever earn it.  
Or deserve it.  
God tells us who we are.  
**As a gift of grace.**

God even writes his name on our forehead.  
In the sign of the cross.  
A way of saying....  
**"Mine, forever and always."**

But then.  
Like the Prodigal Son.  
We grow restless.

We climb out of our safe secure valleys.  
We venture off into the world.  
And we inevitably fall and fail.

## **Ever been there??**

Some of us experience a sense of being lost.

Others of us find ourselves in pigsties of our own making.  
Drugs and alcohol.  
Unhealthy relationships.  
Self-focused and self-destructive lives.

## **Ever been there?**

No matter where our journey takes us.  
We all do what the Prodigal Son does.

We become overwhelmed with guilt.  
We become overwhelmed with shame.

We're sorry for what we've done.  
And we're sorry for what we've become.

Sorry for the thing.  
Big and small.  
That we've done.  
Or left undone.

And so.  
We hide from our loving God.  
And we hide from one another.

We live in fear.  
That we'll be found out.  
Exposed.  
For the failure we believe ourselves to be.

We live a mistaken identity.

**Loser.**

**Failure.**

**Unworthy.**

**Unlovable.**

**Do you know what I'm talking about?**

**Have you been there?**

The question is.

**What happens next?**

We can stay in the shit and mud.

We can continue to wallow in our guilt and shame.

Hiding.

Living under a mistaken identity.

Or we can come back home.

We can return to where it all began.

Here.

In the waters of Baptism.

Here.

In the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

And like the Prodigal Son.

When we return home.

We won't receive what we deserve.

We won't feel the back side of God's mighty hand.



Instead.  
We'll find ourselves welcomed.  
Embraced.  
By the One who never ever stopped loving us.

The one who reminds us who we are.

Flawed.  
But deeply loved.

Sinners.  
But completely forgiven.

### **Beloved Child of God.**

The first step in healing our shame.  
Is to get clear about our identity.

Comment [MG1]:

You are not.  
The sum total of your failures.

You are not.  
Defined by your mistakes.

You are a child of God.

Not because you earned it.

Not because you've worked for it.

Not because you've been good enough.

But simply because.  
God.

Because God.

In God's endless.  
Gracious.  
Unfailing love.  
Has chosen it to be so.

No matter where you are today.  
On the journey of life and faith.  
**Come home.**

Come home.  
To the banqueting table this morning.  
To the feast that's laid out in your honour.

Come home.  
To where you'll find healing for your shame.

Come home.  
To be reminded who you really are.

In this place right now.  
Hear the voice of the Father say to you....  
***"Let's have a feast and celebrate.  
For this child of mine was dead and is alive again;  
They were lost, but now they are found."***

Come home.

Come home and know your true identity.  
As a beloved child of God.

Amen.