

The identity of Jesus is the main idea or theme of the New Testament

His identity entails or involves our identity as well. Both our identity and His identity are intricately linked together.

If Jesus is Savior – whose Savior is He? If He is creator, what or who has He created?

I remember a priest once saying that if we know God as Father, if we address God as Our Father, then at the same time we are acknowledging our own identity also

If He is Father, then whose Father is He? Being a Father means having a son or daughter, and in the case of God the Father, His Son is Jesus Christ and by extension or adoption, we are His sons and daughters

And if we know who Jesus Christ is, then we know Him to be our Savior, and then the question is, from what does He save us? And so, by knowing who God is, by knowing who Jesus is, we know who we are – sinners in need of salvation, beloved by the Lord who died to save us

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus asks his disciples who people are saying that he is. He asks them not because he doesn't already know, but to draw them out for their own good. And they offer the popular guesses: some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And then he asks the disciples who they say he is. Peter, speaking on behalf of the twelve rightly declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Jesus blesses Peter for saying so, tells him that “upon this Rock I will build my church” and He gives him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. What we need to notice is that Jesus says, “*I* will build *my* church” upon this foundation.

In today's Gospel reading from St. John, Jesus uses the language and imagery of the shepherd

His relationship to us, His Church, is very much like the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep

We might have an image of a shepherd as someone who led his sheep around, from pasture to pasture; or we might picture him feeding them;

Jesus uses the imagery of the shepherd because it was very familiar to the people of His time

What we might be overlooking, or not considering, is how deeply invested the shepherd was in his flock

The flock meant the shepherd's livelihood, and of course the livelihood of his family as well – not only his own wife and children, but very often it meant his extended family also

It could even mean a great deal to an entire village

Shepherds were protectors of their flocks; everyone in Jesus's time knew that a flock was vulnerable and practically defenseless

Thieves could come and take all or some of the sheep away, sell them and collect the money that rightly belonged to the shepherd

So the shepherd had to take great care to guard and protect his sheep

The shepherd also had to train his sheep; they had to know his voice and do on command whatever he said

And, as Jesus says, the flock came to know the voice of their shepherd and after that, they would not follow anyone else

A shepherd must take great care in guiding his flock also. He cannot let them wander on their own – He must lead them to where they belong

Jesus was impressing upon His listeners and readers just how much He is invested in us as His Beloved

Shepherds valued their flocks very highly; they invested themselves highly in the care, protection and guidance of their flocks

We matter to God infinitely more than sheep to their shepherds, but the analogy is a good one.

Look how much Jesus is invested in us and for our salvation.

There's an old anecdote that goes like this: two men are going into a restaurant one morning and as they're going to their table one says to another – look what these chickens gave up so that we could have our breakfast this morning, all these eggs. And the other man said, that's nothing compared to what the pig gave up so that we could have bacon.

Anyone who has built something good, something worthwhile – a house, a business, a family – knows what it means to invest yourself in the thing you've made; you know how much it means to you, how much you value it

Multiply that a billion times and you might get an inkling of what we mean to the Lord and how much He is invested in us

He's determined to get each one of us into Heaven; we are His creation and He gave His life, at great personal cost, so that we might know Him and enter His Kingdom

There was once a young boy who built himself a fine model sailboat. He didn't build it from a kit – he gathered the wood, the material for the sails, the string, everything, and made it from scratch. And little by little, day by day, he built his sailboat. He carefully cut the wood for the hull and the masts, formed it all into shape, sanded it, he cut the material for the sails sewed them himself, attached the strings. Then he painted his sailboat and put the finishing touches on. Finally when it was all finished, he took his new sailboat down to the river to test it out. He put his sailboat in the water and was overjoyed as it sailed along beautifully in the breeze.

But then, a much stronger gust of wind came up, and his sailboat took off and got out of reach. The young boy was very sad as he saw his sailboat going down the river and finally out of sight.

A few months later, as he was walking home from school, he passed by the hobby shop. He looked in the storefront window, and lo and behold – there was his sailboat. There was no doubt about it – he recognized it as his own. He should know it was his, he made it from scratch.

He went inside and told the store owner that the boat in the window was his, and asked if he could have it back. The store owner said someone else had brought the boat in a few weeks earlier and traded it for some other things.

The store owner said he was sorry, but he could not let the boat go on the boy's word alone. Anyone could say the same thing.

So the boy went away with a long face feeling very sad. But then he had an idea. The boy asked his uncle if he could work on his farm that summer and he said yes. So all summer long the boy fed chickens, cleaned the barn, helped bail hay and he did all kinds of other things.

Finally, he had enough money to buy the sailboat at the hobby shop. He went to the store, and thankfully no one else had bought it yet so it was still available. He gladly handed the store owner the money for the boat, and took it home with him.

As he was walking home, he spoke to his sailboat and said – “You’re doubly mine! First I made you, and then I bought you!”

And that’s how it is between Jesus and us. He is our Creator and our Redeemer, and we mean far more to Him than we imagine. Amen.