

5.5.2024 Sermon

Faith in Your Identity | Hebrews 11:24-26

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Rev. Saundra Anderson

Good morning,

As Ms. Janis Beatty said, I am Saundra Anderson, and I am a reverend and an elder here at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship. As I started thinking about my introduction and my identity, it made me think of when I first got here, and my choice to identify as Saundra. This choice wasn't even purposeful, and what I mean by identifying as Saundra is that all my life, I've been called Monique, which is my middle name. For me, it was a choice in that moment to say, "Who do I want to be to this group of people?" I said Saundra because, honestly, Saundra meant, for me, a reminder that whoever is calling me that does not know me, or that they are not a safe place for me.

It was interesting that I thought this place would be another place where someone didn't know me, or where I had to hide my identity. That shifted. Do you know that the way you identify affects the choices you make, even down to how you act? Like I said, depending on what you call me, it dictated to me the aspect in which you would even engage with me. Whether you call somebody mother or daughter or son or friend, you become different aspects of whatever somebody's calling you. So, identity is important.

If you were in Alabama, where I'm from, nobody is going to call me Saundra. Monique has been embedded so deeply in me. I recall my graduation; my teacher said, "Baby, your name ain't even on the list." I said, "You do know that Monique is not my real name, right?" Even my family didn't know that my name was Saundra. That's just how rarely I used that name.

But I was home a couple of weeks ago, and I noticed that my father always calls me Saundra Anderson, my first and last name. He'll say Saundra, no matter what anybody else calls me.

When my father calls me, he says Sandra Anderson. It struck something in me that it doesn't matter what anybody else calls you; it doesn't even matter what you call yourself. The only one who has the right and the privilege to give you your name is the one who gave you life. Your parents can name you, but only God, your heavenly Father who created you, has the authority to identify you.

Your parents may have birthed you and named you, but only God knew you before you were even created in your mother's womb. So, when you ask yourself, "Who am I?" who better to seek these answers from than your Creator? It takes faith in believing that the God who created you will help you understand who you are. Only your Creator can tell you why He created you. Until you know who God says you are, you will forever have an identity crisis and continue to make choices based on who you think you are rather than who you really are.

I came today to speak a word of identity over you. To remind you of who you are, I want you to know that it doesn't matter what people have called you or what you've even called yourself. There is only one who has the right and authority to tell you who you are. Circumstances may have made things difficult for you, but they aren't powerful enough to define you. Your history may have marked you, but it is not authorized to label you.

It doesn't matter what people say about you or what people did to you. It may have hurt you, and it may take years to heal from that hurt that is deeply rooted in you. But it doesn't have the power to shape the total reality of who you are called to be. You are not defined by your past; you are not defined by your behaviors, your failures, or your struggles—not even your feelings or your circumstances. You are who God says you are. Your Father in heaven has given you a name. He has chosen you, adopted you, and qualified you. You are not a mistake or an afterthought; you have been created in the very image of God.

That means every aspect of your physicality, the skin you're in, the texture of your hair, the structure of your body—everything about you—is made in the image of God. So, anybody that doesn't like something about you is denying the very God in you. You are an expression of the creative genius of God, even down to your personality. If you are introverted or extroverted, it is not by chance. Even your weaknesses are not a liability to God; they become a platform for the strength of God to be displayed in your life.

The issue of identity is so important because the enemy wants so much to twist the image of who God created you to be that you will either live up to or down to whatever it is that you believe is true about you. We see God change names in the Bible, and even in those name changes, shifts the identity and destiny of that person. When God meets with one person and reworks their view of their identity, it changes the course of their life. Today, I want you to join me in understanding how a defining moment in time changed the course of a man's life. I want

you to understand that your identity can only be revealed in faith and in believing in the God who created you.

As you know, we are journeying through the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, known as the Hall of Fame or the Heroes of Faith. I have the pleasure of continuing the story that Reverend Sophia started last week on the life of Moses. Next week is more continuation, so I have a hard situation to not go too far back and not too far ahead. So, I'm going to try to stay within the constraints of my verses. Journey with me, if you will, to Hebrews 11, verses 24 through 26. I'll be reading from the New Living Translation.

It reads, "It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward."

Now, initially, my first thought was that I didn't necessarily agree with this. I don't know if you know the story of Moses, but for me, I was like, "No, he didn't just make this choice to choose oppression over the palace. He killed somebody, and Pharaoh was after him." So, to me, he had no choice but to leave the palace. I'm glad it's not my interpretation that you are getting today. I'm going to tell you what God has to say through me about this text because I would have left you at that.

Have you ever done something bad for a good reason? Almost everybody has. Just a friendly reminder, don't be a person that means well but does something stupid that causes more problems because usually, that's what happens. We act out of our heat-of-the-moment thoughts, and then sometimes it creates more problems than solutions.

How many of you have been rejected by your own kind? Been there? Does it cause you to shut down and run away, or does it somehow inspire you to do something better? Exactly. I don't think anybody who's dealt with rejection somehow gets some jolt of inspiration. Rejection and abandonment bring layers of pain, and sometimes it takes years to heal from them.

To understand why Moses even made the heroes of faith, you have to understand what this pivotal moment meant for him. Just a side note, I don't know what Pastor Tracy's problem is, but this is my second sermon dealing with a murderer. I don't know if she's sending me a subliminal message. If you get nothing else, please control your anger. Maybe she thinks I have anger issues, I don't know. Since she got the baby, you know, in the killing type of sermons, and I got all the murderers, maybe you own it.

To understand this, you have to move backward in the story of Exodus. Like we journeyed last week, I mean, picking up from where Reverend Sophia left off. I'm going to dabble a little bit into Pharaoh's daughter because, for you to understand Moses' identity and why he wanted to reject being the son of Pharaoh's daughter, you have to understand her role. Pharaoh's daughter did a courageous and compassionate thing. She went against her father's decree to save Moses. She took a chance on him, knowing that her father said every Hebrew boy should be thrown into the river. She saw the baby and knew he was Hebrew, yet still chose to save him.

In that moment, she made a choice to save Moses instead of calling her dad and saying, "Guess what good deed I did today?" She did something miraculous. She sent him back to his mother and even provided for his upbringing, like the first story in the Bible of child support. She literally paid his mother to raise him and then brought him back to raise as her own. Only God can do such a thing. Of all the people who could have found the baby, it was Pharaoh's daughter.

Imagine how Pharaoh reacted to suddenly having a baby. Everyone knew him as the prince of Egypt, and Moses' name meant the baby drawn from the water. So, every time she called his name, it reminded her of her act of saving him. Somehow, Pharaoh accepted it and allowed her to raise Moses and bestow everything he had upon him. Moses, born Hebrew and raised Egyptian, was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, powerful in speech and action, and known as the prince of Egypt.

So, life was probably good. What would make him choose oppression? Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, yet she was the very person who saved him. Isn't that like children? They grow up and decide they don't want to be associated with you. Moses is a trendsetter. Maybe identifying as the grandson responsible for the enslavement and brutality he saw made him no longer want to be associated with it.

You can't solve a problem when you low-key support it, even in silence. Innocent bystanders doing nothing still perpetuate the problem. Imagine Moses defending a slave in the streets but coming home to let a slave in his house feed and bathe him. How crazy is that?

We do the same thing. It's okay unless it goes too far. I don't have to pay you your worth, but as long as you're getting minimum wage, it's okay. What a position to be in. Sometimes when you are deeply rooted in systems, it's hard to even notice the problem and step outside to see things from a different perspective. Even culturally, we don't realize the generational curses we pass along because we are so embedded in these systems. It's okay to sweep child abuse, domestic abuse, molestation, mental and verbal abuse under the rug because it's part of our family and culture histories to hold these deep dark secrets.

What if we took a stand and said, "No, I refuse to let this continue to another generation?" What if we, like Moses, decided to do something about it? Are we bold enough to lose the riches and comfortability of our houses for the sake of others? That's what Moses did. As soon as he made this choice, it shifted his stance on what he could do. Some of us are so comfortable in these systems that we won't stand up for people because of what it means for us.

What am I going to lose if I stand up for this person? Do I lose my house? My spouse? My status? My job? How much do we hold on to what we think we're going to lose because we don't have faith that if we stand up, God will still provide? So, we watch people oppressed and watch systems of oppression and inequality go on because we are afraid to make the choice like Moses did. He made the heroes of faith by saying, "Hey, I'm going to do something about it." Are we too comfortable where we are, or does it not affect us because we don't identify with it?

Usually, until it strikes home, and it becomes you, your family members, or somebody you love, it doesn't compel you to do anything. Moses didn't realize it until he spent a day outside the palace with his people to see the oppression. Exodus 2:11-14 says, "For many years, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his people, the Hebrews, and saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews. After looking in all directions to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. The next day, when Moses went out to visit his people again, he saw two Hebrew men fighting. 'Why are you beating up your friend?' Moses said to the one who had started the fight. The man replied, 'Who appointed you to be our prince and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' Moses was afraid, thinking everyone knows what I did."

It wasn't until Moses made this visit that something struck him. Until you get out of your bubble and comfort zone, it'll never strike you. The difference with Moses is that in this moment, he makes a rash decision. He looks in all directions, indicating that he didn't want anybody to see. Anytime you do something and start looking around, that's an indicator that it's probably something you shouldn't be doing.

So, Moses, the Egyptian, and the Hebrew are the three people in this story. Moses kills the Egyptian, thinking he did something good. That's why I didn't agree with the earlier text, which says the next day. My assumption, since Pharaoh wasn't after him, is that Moses went back home. I don't know if Moses planned to do this every day and keep hiding bodies until they started piling up, which would eventually cause another problem, as they would have thought the Hebrews were killing off the Egyptians.

The next day, Moses comes back and feels like, "Hey, why are you guys doing this?" Have you been in situations where you try to save somebody, and then they turn on you? Like, "Who died and made you boss?" Nobody wants you to tell them what they're doing wrong. Then they call him out, saying, "Aren't you the guy that killed somebody yesterday?" Moses thought only three people knew, and one was dead. Could it be the very person he saved went back and told his deepest secret?

Imagine this moment for Moses: somebody exposed your deepest secret, and the reason you did it was for them. The very people you think you are called to save are saying, "We don't want you. All we see you as is a murderer." Moses doesn't want to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter or identified as an Egyptian oppressor, but the people he assumed would receive him don't want him either. The Pharaoh, his grandfather, is now out to kill him.

What a moment, what a loss of identity, to not know who you are or where you belong when the number one thing we all want is to belong. To know that somebody wants us, identifies with us, sees us as important, and acknowledges our calling. When you tell them, "I'm called to you," they receive you and not reject you.

But that's not the case for Moses. Just because you feel compelled to make a change doesn't mean you take things into your own hands. Moses was called to be a deliverer, but at that moment, he decided to be a judge. Even Jesus came and said, "I didn't come to judge you; I came to set you free." Because Moses moved prematurely, he felt compelled to do something, but that's why it's important to wait on the Lord. Allow God to direct your path. It's also a matter of the timing of God, which you will see later on, probably next week, in the next sermon, when the timing was right.

God can give you glimpses of who you are throughout your life, but it may not be the time. It's like getting a prophecy and someone declaring something over your life. I got prophecies even when I was a little girl on who I was called to be, but it wasn't until last year that I was ordained. Whether the people before didn't recognize my calling or whether Cornerstone was the divine place meant for it to be birthed, I didn't just catapult myself out there.

Even without catapulting myself, I still received rejection from the church. Rejection shuts you down. If you feel rejected, you're not going to want to push forward, saying, "Hey, I know what God has called me to be." The more somebody tells you what you aren't, the more it sticks to you. We carry these badges, and every time somebody else rejects us, it shuts us down more. The more God tries to say, "Hey, but I called you to this," it slides right off because everything else sticks to us.

We want to be accepted so badly that we buy into what people call us. I was talking earlier about animals, how I had a dog named Jackson, and if someone calls him something else now, he'd probably respond. Because it doesn't matter what I identified him as, a new master gives him a new name. We take on whatever they call us. Who are our masters? Who are we allowing to call us something that we answer to?

Shame breeds insecurity, which is a doorway to deception. Whenever there is shame, there is a sense to hide parts of yourself from being seen because of the fear of not being accepted and rejected. We become liars, putting on masks, only showing compartmentalized parts of ourselves, never revealing or understanding who we are because of the secrets we have hidden in the sands of our minds and hearts. You can never fully walk in your identity while hiding parts of yourself, especially the parts tied to guilt and shame.

God still chose Moses, even as a murderer. Sometimes people put these labels on us, and we hold onto them. Even when people aren't calling it, we bring it back up for ourselves because it's attached to that guilt and shame. But even God didn't see that as a disqualification for who He called Moses to be. People label you and disqualify you, and God still calls you.

Not to get ahead too far into next week's lesson, but when Moses runs, he ends up at a well. When people are running, they eventually become thirsty and need something to drink. The Lord always provides what we need. Just like the woman at the well, He's not offering a drink for a day but a drink for a lifetime. He didn't condemn her; He confronted her with her identity. God brings us to places and reveals our true identity and who He called us to be, to embrace that and never thirst again.

We, too, are wells. Wells are open vessels where water can be drawn from to be a place where those who are thirsty can draw from us and be refilled to complete the race before them. If we hold onto these dark secrets and deep spaces where we continue to say, "Hey, I'm not good enough," we can't be wells for other people. The principle of a well is that what takes years to dig only takes moments to pour. That's the power we have.

One man gets a handle on his identity and frees a whole group of people. Do you know what will happen if all of us get a hold of our identity? It could change the nation if only we held on to who God really said we are.

One thing that came to me last night was how we always have this faith in God that He can do exceedingly, abundantly, all that we can ask or think. We believe so much in His identity, but when it comes to us, that's the very thing we say God can't do. "You can't use me. Why would you use me?" We believe Him to do everything else and for everybody else, but when it comes to us, we minimize so much. Our identity is like some type of toy we constantly play with. One

minute we're like, "Yeah, I can be who you said I can be," and the moment a circumstance comes up, we put it back on the shelf.

We leave it there and forget who God called us to be. Then one day, we pick it back up, get inspired, and say, "Yeah, I remember you said I can do this." Then something else comes up, life starts living, and you say, "Oh, not for me. You can't do this for me. You can't show up for me. You can call everybody else but me. I got deep, dark secrets. I hid a person in the sand. You can't use me." And God is saying, "But I still can use a murderer." We limit ourselves, not God. We limit ourselves because we are afraid to be who God called us to be.

Why are you so afraid to become you? Maybe you're not a Moses. Maybe you're not called to thousands of people. But what if the only thing you're called to do is be authentically you? And you don't even want to do it. You can't even see you because of years of holding onto your past. The things you hear are so deeply rooted that they keep coming back up. God sees it and still longs for you. We use those hidden things and say, "God, you're not supposed to use people like me, are you?" But that's your testimony. That's how we read in the Bible, testimonies of people that shouldn't have been used. None of these people are perfect. We read every Sunday about people who were flawed, and God still blessed them. He still used them, He still called them to nations.

We think because we did one thing, we are somehow disqualified. Like, He stopped accepting people because of you. I don't want to sound mean, but you're not that special for God to stop being God and forget why He created you because you don't want to see who you are. The issue is not God rejecting you. The reality is you reject yourself. It doesn't really matter what anyone else calls you.

It didn't change people calling me Sondra. I was still who I was at my core. Regardless of who you call me, I'm still me. Whether you identify with me as your friend, as your spouse, as your daughter—whoever—I don't change. Who God has called me to be doesn't change because of a label or title. But sometimes those titles become so much for some of you that that's all you see. The moment one of those titles is wiped away, you don't even know who you are without that title. We have to get a hold of our identity. As I wrote this, I heard the voice of God.

I want to submit to you this blessing that I heard God speak to us today about who He says He is. I don't want to read it from my perspective; I want to read it from the voice of God. I'm submitting this to you because that's how I heard it. Close your eyes and open your hands because there's a gift I want to give to you. You have been bought with a price and adopted as my child. Because you belong to me, I know everything there is to know about you. I am so intimately aware of you. I knew you and saw who I created you to be before I formed you in your mother's womb.

Carefully and skillfully, I shaped you from nothing to something before you even saw the light of day. Every single moment I am thinking of you. You have access to my wisdom, for you are reconciled in me. You are not condemned by me, for you have been justified. You are completely forgiven and tenderly loved. You are free from any condemning charges. You can approach me with boldness, freedom, and confidence. You have been completed in me. You are a sweet fragrance to me. You are a warrior priesthood, firmly rooted and built in me. You have the mind of Christ. You are a temple in which I choose to dwell. You are blameless and beyond reproach. You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

You are chosen by me to bear fruit. My desires towards you are more than the grains of sand on every shore. I read your mind like an open book and know all the words you're about to speak before you even start a sentence. I know every step you would take before your journey even begins. I have gone into your future to prepare the way, and in kindness, I follow behind you to spare you from the harm of your past. Wherever you go, my hand will guide you, and my strength will empower you. I have laid my hand on you. If you ask what you can do or where you can go to run from me, the answer is nothing and nowhere.

Nothing and I mean nothing can separate my love for you. No one can pluck you out of my hand. I have no reason to lie to you. Everything that I say is true. Before I laid the foundations of the earth, I had you in mind. I settled on you as the focus of my love, to be made whole and holy by my love. You are free to enter into the celebration of lavish gift-giving by the hand of Jesus. You are joint heirs with your brother and share in his inheritance. I thought of everything and provided everything you could possibly need for life and godliness. It is in me you find out who you are and what you are living for. Long before you even heard of me, I had my eyes on you. Your life is a part of the overall purpose I am working out in this marvelous plan that I took such delight in making.

You are a wonderful gift of salvation given to you through the truth. When you believe this precious gift as a reminder, you will get everything I have planned for you. You have direct access to me to commune with me, to be in relation with me, to be intertwined and divine with me—I in you and you in me. All things work together for your good because you love me and are called for my purpose. You have been established, anointed, and sealed by me. You can be confident in this very thing, that the good work I started in you, I will be faithful to bring it all the way to completion. You can do all things because I will give you strength.

I will give you the desires of your heart, even your desires to be seen, to be loved, to be accepted, and not rejected. I am for you and not against you. You are who I say you are. May my words resound in your ears like clanging cymbals, louder than the lies spoken over you. May they cling to your heart like clean grout, deeply embedded in your life, becoming the DNA

and forming into your identity. Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. Let the language of Heaven be birthed in your hearts today, the revelation of who you are in Me. May the places in your hearts that have gone unhealed be healed today.

Every broken mental space, every broken emotional space, for those who are running from callings and assignments because of hurt, misunderstanding, and rejection. For those who were raised differently, those who were raised not in the ideal way, may you see that the hand of the Lord has been with you, as I was with Moses on his journey. May you understand that you don't have to be understood to be called. I have chosen and called you. I come against a lack of confidence. You are who you are because I have called you. Today I am doing a new work in your heart. I am faithful. So, put your hope and faith in me. Walk in alignment with faith and your identity. In Jesus' name.