

Facing Anonymity

Living Unknown

Nameless↔Faceless↔Traceless

(1Peter 2:9-10)

You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, His very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy." NLT

[Matthew 5:13-16]

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. 14 You are the light of the world — like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. 15 Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." NLT

Introduction

Connectedness – openness – community - relationship, are a powerful way to live. It is the way Jesus asked His followers to live. Living connected and openly – in community and right relationship creates for people an identity and place where as they say...

“everyone knows my name.” But this kind of life is not for everyone apparently. The words are warm and sound nice so culturally we use them often - but the reality of living one's life with others, knowing and loving others is a difficult path. It is difficult because it carries both expectation and responsibility. The expectation is that others can know and love you. The responsibility is simply living in a real and active relationship with another human being. What is increasingly apparent is that our mainstream society does not want to live that way and is choosing a life far away from the distinctive “road less traveled” that leads to real community. Mainstream is trending and choosing a life without courage, responsibility, or distinction – opting for a life among the masses, to move along towards a destiny that no one really cares enough to know, while anonymously co-existing alongside people that no one really does know. But... why? Why do people migrate to such anonymity as if almost to be searching for some comfortable levels of social and personal ambiguity? It is quite clear, at least for the

mainstream American culture, that courageous, unique, and identifiable individuality is out - and people are becoming more content to be drawn into living life as vague and as indistinctively as possible. Opting to live as virtual unknowns among millions of other unknowns. Because of fear and lack of real truth people allow themselves each day to hide anonymously among the masses – and not from the masses. Moment by moment there is nameless faceless and traceless maneuvering as if by fearful instinct, in and out - side to side - up and down – back and forth. With each movement the anonymous become more anonymous and less noticeable and identifiable. With each life drama, personal conflict, and individual disappointment there is more and more intentional movement to living unknown and becoming nameless – faceless – traceless.

But this is not what God has planned for us – we who believe in Christ have been given a name, a face, and a place. In the next six weeks we will find out what *Facing Anonymity* means for our lives and the lives of our families and this community. Around the world, Christians are facing anonymity and the challenge of putting a name and a face on their faith and daily life – that name and face is Jesus. We too at Reunion will face the challenge of anonymity. We will face anonymity with the light of God that reminds us who we are, where we have come from and illuminates the path to where we are going. It is that light that shines on our countenance, and pierces the darkness that threatens to pull our families and friends into anonymity and a life unknown as nameless – faceless - traceless. we do not serve an unknown God; because Jesus is - we are. (Acts 17:16-31)

Characteristics of Anonymity – Living Unknown

- Names without Namesake
- Entitlement without Investment or Ownership
- Expression without Consequence or Responsibility
- Relationship without Commitment
- Consumption without Reciprocation
- Deception without or Detection

Nameless

(John 10:3-5)

The gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice. 5 They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his

voice." NLT

Living Unknown – Nameless

Think for a moment how often we say the words... “Hello, my name is.” Or... How many times would you guess during the average lifetime does a person ask or is asked the question “what is your name”? It makes me think of the line from the Princess Bride... “*Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.*” Sometimes there is lots of baggage in a name! But “what’s in a name - right? Well if one is truly interested in the question it can more often than not provide a profound sense of insight. For within this one *simple - social* protocol is wrapped one of life’s most significant essentials, something we call *rooted-ness*. To introduce the term I love to use this excerpt from one of my favorite social philosophers Simone Weil.

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his or her real, active and natural participation in the life of his or her community (people), which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions and circumstances of birth, profession and social surroundings. Every human being needs to have roots. Without them nothing in life moral, intellectual or spiritual will form as it should.

...Simone Weil

So, I believe that much of our rooted-ness in the sense of the “who – what - where – why – when” (all of the meaningful personal stuff about us) is in fact uniquely connected to our name. This was God’s idea not mine. But here are three examples of why I believe this...

- One - In our name is the distinguishable word or term that we are known by.
- Two -In our name is the perception of our character and reputation.
- Three - In our name is life’s beginnings, realities, imaginations, meaning, value, and of course life’s end.

When this is not accessible or functional to a person there is a distinct weakness and doubt that is formed in them from the void or loss of family rooted-ness. The loss is undeniable. If this rootless-ness is not corrected or figured out then the weakness and doubt can capture the human spirit and undermine and demoralize every level of the person’s life. This loss also creates

From the Loss of Family Rooted-ness (comes)

- Random People (Who – How – Why)
- Un-heritable People (Named but no Namesake)
- People without People (No Sense of Belonging)

This loss of rooted-ness is clearly why God made “*the name of Jesus the name that would be above all other names*” (Philippians 2:9). And, that there would be “*no other name under heaven that any one can be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Finally by believing in Christ we have been “*identified as His own by giving us the Holy Spirit as He promised. The Spirit is God’s personal guarantee that He will then give us the inheritance He also promised us as His very own people.*” What this means is simply this... In Jesus Christ we become the people God, fully heritable regardless of who we are or from where we come. There are no random people in Jesus – there are no unnamed people in Jesus – and there are no people without people in Jesus! We my brothers and sisters are called by His name and are now the people of God (no longer nameless). Look around - we are indeed His peeps!

Active Solutions

- **Gather up children and grandchildren share the open and honest story of their name and the rooted-ness of your family, and then do the same with the family of God.** (1 Corinthians 15:3-11)
- **Identify and talk frequently about your name – as it is defined by reputation, character, and inheritance.** (Proverbs 22:1) *A few years ago Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, offered WGN Chicago Radio sports-talk host David Kaplan \$50,000 to change his name legally to "Dallas Maverick." When Kaplan politely declined, Cuban sweetened the offer. Cuban would pay Kaplan \$100,000 and donate \$100,000 to Kaplan's favorite charity if he took the name for one year. After some soul-searching, and being bombarded by e-mails from listeners who said he was crazy to turn down the money, Kaplan held firm and told Cuban no. Kaplan explained: "I'd be saying I'd do anything for money, and that bothers me. My name is my birthright. I'd like to preserve my integrity and credibility." "Christian" is the birthright of every follower of Jesus Christ. We have a responsibility to live every day in a way that brings honor to that name.*
- **Consistently make an intentional spiritual connection with your life to the name of Jesus. Rediscover what having His name means to your rooted-ness, your reality, and your eternal destiny.** (Acts 17:24-31)

The Final Word...

(2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

"I will live in them

and walk among them.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

Therefore, come out from them

and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord.

Don't touch their filthy things,

and I will welcome you.

And I will be your Father,

and you will be my sons and daughters,

says the Lord Almighty."

NLT

Faceless

(Luke 6:44-45)

A tree is identified by the kind of fruit it produces. Figs never grow on thorn bushes or grapes on bramble bushes. 45 A good person produces good deeds from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil deeds from an evil heart. Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.

NLT

Living Unknown – Faceless

We are going to define *faceless* in this context as the loss of one's identity, distinctiveness, and openness. Anonymity is the emerging mechanism that currently is defacing social integrity, emotional intelligence and a family's hope for reputable succession. This has all been done subtly but persistently through the means of cultural relativism (*the belief that truth, goodness and what is right are not absolute*) as and nihilism (*the belief that all human values and moral authority are worthless – nothing*).

I don't want something so important as this to get washed away by an

undercurrent philosophical blah, blah, blah. So, what I am saying in “plain speak” is this... people are becoming faceless non-distinctive, and anonymous – and even though it is primarily self-centered at the core people are opting to believe that living only for ones self is an easier and more comfortable way to live. I am also saying that people around you are more and more becoming someone you once thought you knew – only to discover that you really don’t know them at all. What we are describing is the process of defacing or the creating the faceless. But living unknown faceless and anonymous is not God’s plan for us. So how can you and I avoid this? How can we help one another to “save face”? And, what is God saying about living faceless in anonymity?

We begin first with identifying with openness and self-honesty (*telling our self the truth*) the process and root causes of defacing. For today we are actually going use our time together to share how we can identify and unravel these processes and causes. From there we will move forward to affirm the truth in us all – “we as Christ followers are not faceless – as Jesus was the face of God, we are to be the face of Jesus.” This is so that we would become His expressed image and mirrored reflection in our world. To clarify... that would not be a certain look we have or mask we wear – it is a countenance and with that countenance comes very visible and distinctive characteristics... expressions... and expectations. We are not faceless. And finally, together we are going to continue to put into action the strategies given to us by God in Christ to face our anonymity (save face). We’ve got two weeks! So lets get started.

You Know You are Faceless When...

- A lie is no longer a lie – it is now just a personally rationalized version of the truth. **(delusional)**
- There is a misguided belief or an arrogant assumption that one is rightly entitled to a benefit or belonging that they have not first earned or paid for. **(taker)**
- When there are unhealthy patterns of verbal, emotional, or physical expression without a genuine sense of responsibility, consequence, or ownership for one’s personal thoughts words and behavior. **(abuser)**
- If technology subtly becomes a hiding place for the socially messy and awkward; away from face to face explanations, handshakes of mutual agreement, the comfort and reassurance of an embrace, the intuitions and insights from eye contact, and the warmth of another human spirit. **(shadow dweller)**

- the darkness of a person's "secret life" overtakes the light of their "public life" skewing the perception of reality, undermining the ability to make sound moral and ethical decisions - moving one uncontrollably from freedom to bondage **(pretender)**
- When belief and hope have slipped quietly away into the stillness of loss and betrayal, regret and failure; waiting to be buried down inside - along with everything else that no longer moves or lives within them. **(mourner)**

Ultimately...

Delusional are faceless because... they cannot face reality.

Takers are faceless because... they cannot face responsibility.

Abusers are faceless because... they cannot face consequences.

Shadow Dwellers are faceless because... they cannot face life.

Pretenders are faceless because... they cannot face the truth.

Mourners are faceless because... they cannot face tomorrow.

The Final Word – (Matthew 5:3-16)

Faceless II

Today we will move forward to affirm truth concerning *faceless anonymity*. A truth that we hope can become embedded within us all...

“As Christ followers we are not faceless – just as Jesus was the face and countenance

of God, we are the face and countenance of Jesus.”

This bible teaches us that Jesus was the express image (exact representation) of God the Father.

(Hebrews 1:1-3)

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it. 3 The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of his command. After he died to cleanse us from the stain of sin, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God of heaven. NLT

In this sense the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Job, and David no longer a faceless conscience of an elect people group (Jews) – but rather a visible (incarnate) and verifiable (foretold) Messiah for all people. As God *with a face* Jesus shared His thoughts – His words - and His deeds, with the faceless people - those living unknown in anonymity. ***His life*** gave witness to the word of God, and ***His mission*** made known the will of God. And in the end, ***His sacrifice*** revealed the love of God. The identity of God fully made known in Jesus. God was no longer faceless in the world He Himself created (Colossians 1:15-17). He was the light of the world and God even in allowing the murder of Jesus would never be faceless again to anyone. With His resurrection came the power of the Spirit - and now God through the Holy Spirit began to put His face on us! How and why God puts His face on us has always been His perfect plan to uniquely make us His very own people. If we do not come to understand how and why God’s plan included us then we run the risk of living our life in anonymity – faceless and apart from Him. Jesus while He was here said to His disciples and to all who would believe in Him the following...

“you are the light of the world – like a city on a mountain glowing in the night for all to see” (Matthew 5:14)

“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my followers” (John 13:35)

“I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives.” (John 14:27)

"The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." (John 14:12-13)

"You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name." (John 15:16-17)

"But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere..." (Acts 1:8)

The Holy Spirit: Putting the Face of God on Us

- **Our Life** – a witness to the living word of God.
- **Our Mission** – to make known the will of God.
- **Our Sacrifice** – revealing the love of God.

The Final Word

(2 Corinthians 3:7-18)

That old system of law etched in stone led to death, yet it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. 8 Shouldn't we expect far greater glory when the Holy Spirit is giving life? 9 If the old covenant, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new covenant, which makes us right with God! 10 In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new covenant. 11 So if the old covenant, which has been set aside, was full of glory, then the new covenant, which remains forever, has far greater glory. 12 Since this new covenant gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory fading away. 14 But the people's minds were hardened, and even to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, a veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. 15 Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. 17 Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. 18 And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

Living Unknown – Traceless - Intro

Did you ever just lose track of someone that you have either known or spent time with? I mean it seemed like they were usually around but then one day you looked for them and just like that they were gone – without a trace. They gave no signs that they were leaving so no one really noticed. You ask around and discover that no one really was connected or close enough to them to have any information or ideas of where he or she are, or why they have gone. How many people have disappeared from our life into anonymity – without a trace? Here is an even more difficult question. Did you ever lose track of yourself? And, how many of us in fact have made ourselves to some degree traceless? How many disconnected compartments and pieces of our personality and character remain hidden in anonymity... unknown and traceless? This is not God's plan for us or our families – He has something different in mind for us – something much, much better. For the next two weeks together we are going to find out what that is. Today we will focus introspectively – tracing and retracing our self and then reconnecting. Next week we are going to look directly into the face of Jesus for insight and direction for how to find the traceless all around us. There are in particular three of Jesus' parables that will give us three critical insights into the heart of God concerning traceless people and living unknown in anonymity. That is where we will finish.

Parable One – The Lost Sheep Luke 15:4-7

Insight One – Value of the Traceless

Parable two – The Lost Coin Luke 15:8-10

Insight Two – Searching for the Traceless

Parable Three – The Lost Son Luke 15:11-32

Insight Three – Connecting the Traceless

Traceless I

Traceless is the final piece to facing anonymity and living unknown. For this context we are going to define “traceless” as a person or persons living life in various levels of obscurity – without any sense of obligation or appreciation for being connected to others. To live ***traceless*** is to live in hiding – whether that be traceless physically, spiritually or emotionally – it is still hiding. What is crazy is that I t is in fact hiding from the very

stuff that God intends to draw and call us to... that is - people, places and things. Let's be completely open and honest - hiding physically, spiritually or emotionally without a trace ***is all about fear – hurt - and truth***. We all know the drill – but I think it is important for us to walk through it together. We can start with the fact that the whole idea becoming traceless of course is to disappear into anonymity and obscurity, where no one can find you. You want to run and hide, you want to get away from everyone and everything, and you do not want to face what you are having to face. That is pretty much it – and we all have been there, and probably at one of those levels we mentioned earlier (physical, spiritual, and emotional) some of us are still there right now. So the next step is what is it to ask...

What are we really trying to get away from?

- *Away from what makes you afraid.*
- *Away from what makes you hurt.*
- *Away from what makes you face the truth.*

So... what is that for you? What is it that makes us *afraid* or *hurt* or have to *face the truth*? That is easy... but yet very complicated.

PEOPLE ⇔ RELATIONSHIPS
 RESPONSIBILITY ⇔ EXPECTATIONS
 EMOTIONS ⇔ FEELINGS
 GOD ⇔ SPIRIT

Living Unknown Traceless II

Today we are going to conclude the Traceless teaching by looking at three of Jesus' parables that will give us three critical insights into the heart of God concerning traceless people and living unknown in anonymity.

Parable One – The Lost Sheep Luke 15:4-7

Insight One – Value of the Traceless

Parable Two – The Lost Coin Luke 15:8-10

Insight Two – Searching for the Traceless

Parable Three – The Lost Son Luke 15:11-32

Insight Three – Connecting/Re-connecting the Traceless

How Jesus in His love handled the traceless and anonymous has become the faithful follower's most valuable resource as to an actual insight into the heart of God. When a person or persons decide to live their life or portions of their life unknown in anonymity and to make themselves or portions of themselves *traceless* it is a call to reality for ministry in our present day – **in fact I believe it is the ministry of our day.** The truth is that from the beginning of time sin and its “*ripple effect*” or “*collateral damage*” on people has always pushed people into some type of anonymity. Because of sin and its effects and damage people run – people hide. Of course there are many reasons for that but none of them really good enough considering God's considerable provision and consistent mercy for us His most valuable creature. He did not stop there. No, in His Son Jesus He offered the perfect way for us to process the impact and effects of sin. In Him we no longer had to hide and cover our tracks. In Him we no longer had to run and disappear from everyone and everything – gone without a trace. The final truth on this whole traceless thing is this. There is no place that God cannot find or trace us. In His Son Jesus the Holy Spirit becomes a 24/7 tracking and GPS system. Listen to these two passages of Old and New Testament scripture.

(Psalm 139:1-9)

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. 2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. 3 You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. 4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. 5 You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know! 7 I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! 8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. 9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, 10 even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. 11 I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night — 12 but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you. NLT

(Romans 8:35-39)

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? 36 (Even the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") 37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. 38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. 39 Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of

God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. NLT

He does not track us a predator but as a Savior and loving Father. Traceless and anonymity does not fly with God. Jesus re-enforces this through His life, will and sacrifice in His “love for every one” gospel. This gospel became the mantra of Christianity. No need to hide we will love you like Jesus. We wear His face. But we make a mistake when we assume that everybody around us buys into the message and is fully connected to it. In truth that is a mistake that as followers of Jesus who are seeking to live in a “love beyond love” community we must not make. When it does we need to go and search and look for those lost. Traceless disappearances of our own and from others however do tell us several helpful and important things that we can be sure of...

Maybe they were never really connected to begin with.

They were once connected at some level, but no longer want to be.

They knew down inside it was time to get connected and they ran from it.

And now – we take the truth and insights of Jesus and we do the only thing we were ever called truly do in his kingdom – love. Love relentlessly, love tirelessly, love mercifully, love passionately, love openly, but just love. Love destroys anonymity and love finds the traceless...

Facing Anonymity Conclusion

Our “active word” passages for this series of teachings have been... it is important that you have this truth in your heart.

(1Peter 2:9-10)

You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, His very own possession. This is so you

can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy." NLT

[Matthew 5:13-16]

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. 14 You are the light of the world — like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. 15 Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. NLT

Conclusion

Connectedness – openness – community - relationship, are a powerful way to live. It is the way Jesus asked His followers to live. Living connected and openly – in community and right relationship creates for people an identity and place where as they say...

"everyone knows my name."

What have we learned these last eight weeks?

One – the more difficult the circumstances of life become that many people move towards some sort of anonymous life style. That anonymity *is* hiding and hiding is the result of hurt and fear... ***We hide -***

- ***Away from what makes us afraid.***
- ***Away from what makes us hurt.***
- ***Away from what makes us face the truth.***

Two – we learned have learned to identify those things that make us *afraid* or *hurt* or have to *face the truth*.

- **PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS**
- **RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS EXPECTATIONS**
- **EMOTIONS AND OUR FEELINGS**
- **GOD AND HIS SPIRIT**

Three – we have learned this is not what God has planned for us – we who believe in

Christ have been given a name, a face, and a place.

What should we do now with what we have learned?

One – we need to face anonymity in Christ and settle for nothing less than what He Himself expects for us.

Two – Resolve within our self and among ourselves that no one is remains nameless – faceless – traceless. We will use the model of Jesus to get it done. We will value – search – and welcome anyone living unknown in anonymity. That means the following...

No one is Invisible – No one is Unapproachable – No one is Unlovable – Everyone is Valuable

Three – our foundational spiritual formation is more important and needed than ever before...

***Worship Together – Pray Together – Serve Together – Learn Together
Break Bread Together***

Over the next few weeks I want us to start to put into our everyday practice several things that will help us face anonymity and become the light of the world – a city set on a hill.

- 1) Each Sunday for the next few weeks we will take pictures of this community both as individuals and with families - those pictures will be placed on the When I Think of You Prayer Wall. When you see your picture please fill in your name and how someone like me can pray for you.
- 2) Each week when you gather make sure you plan for some extra time to go to the wall and pray for the names, faces and needs that you see and feel.
- 3) Sometime during our weekly gatherings - go to one or more of the people you have prayed for at the wall take their hands and pray with them face to face.