

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

October 13, 2024

Lesson 7

Title: The Identity Given to Us

Texts: 1 Samuel 1:20-28

One of my prized possessions is the first Bible that I owned. I was seven years old, and my daddy said that I was beginning to read well enough that I should have my own Bible. I remember that he opened a Cokesbury catalog and let me pick the one I wanted.

It is a King James translation; it has a blue cover. And, as a reminder that this was my father's gift to me, my name is inscribed in his handwriting. This memory begins to help me understand the title of this week's lesson: "The Identity Given to Us."

That is what is going on in the focal text, 1 Samuel 1:20-28. The boy Samuel—the man Samuel—begins to get his identity as his mother left him for the priest Eli to raise in the temple. There, he grows. There, he learns. There, he serves. There, he challenges. There, he ministers. Samuel's identity as a prophet comes alive. Let me share another personal family story. Toni and I named our son with the traditional family name Belton Joyner III. When he was a teenager, he began to go to conference youth ministry events. His name tag, of course, read "Belton Joyner."

Because I had once been director of conference youth ministry, folks would recognize the name and come up to him and ask about me. He wanted to claim these faith journeys as his own, not as mine. He began to put "B.J." on his name tags. It stood for "Belton Joyner," but others did not know that and would all call him "B.J."

For the rest of his life, he stuck with that nickname, and it all began because he wanted the family faith story to be his and not just a mirror of mine.

Samuel found out what many of us have experienced. Our faith identity may be given to us, but it becomes even more powerful when we claim it as our own.

1 Samuel 3:19 adds to the drama of Hannah's leaving Samuel at the temple: "So Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground" (CEB). Hannah stayed in touch—look at 1 Samuel 2:18-20—but the identity now continued in Samuel.

Our identity is shaped by what is passed on to us. Truth to tell, sometimes it is in resistance to that identity that we find our own. Who is living out the faith tradition that you pass on? We might say, "Who is the Samuel that we present to the temple?"

What Someone Else Has Said:

In his book *Me and We* (Abingdon Press), Leonard Sweet wrote: "It is no historical happenstance that individualism and depression (melancholia) developed simultaneously in Western culture from 1600 upwards."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Thank You, Lord, for those who have shaped my journey of faith . . ."

F. Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in *Adult Bible Studies* for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.