

A few years ago I was to do a memorial service in the afternoon. That morning, some workmen were doing some repair work in the chapel and there was a strong smell of solvents when they were finished. I had to air it out, so I propped open the back door, which faced my office, with some heavy books from off my shelves. Later, just before the family and friends would be gathering, I went to close the back door, and when I scooted the books out of the way, I received a start. A lizard

went darting down the hall away from me. Apparently the lizard had hidden himself under the books. What's more, when I scooted the books, his tail was separated from his body and remained on the floor in front of me. That lizard left his tail behind in order to get away from danger, scurrying off to freedom.

That lizard reminds me of something St Paul wrote: *You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book. The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him.*□

(Philippians 3:4b-9 The Message) If he had clung to his past, his old self, he would be in danger of putting trust in his greatest triumphs or being shamed by his greatest failures. Neither identify who he is. His identity comes from being joined with Christ in baptism. His new self, his redeemed and sanctified self as a follower of Christ can grow because his old self does not define him any longer. (It does not disappear, but it isn't who he is. He is clear that he WAS that man, but is not him any longer.) In Christ, he is a new creation.

I am reminded of Victor Hugo's character Jean Valjean in "Les Miserables" who was a convict in his early life but due to the intervention and kindness of a priest who challenged him to live up to his "redeemed soul" assumed a new identity and went on to be a successful business man, the mayor of his town, and the benefactor of many. But the awful secret of his time as a convict haunted him his whole life because even though he changed his outward identity AND EVEN THOUGH HE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO DOING GOOD AND BEING A BLESSING TO OTHERS--BEING TRANSFORMED IN CHARACTER--he could not let go of THE IDENTITY OF his past. He continued to define himself by his years as a convict. It cost him everything that mattered in the end because the secret became a barrier between himself and those he loved. He was not able to take on the new identity until it was nearly too late.

It is never too late with Christ. Our new identity, as a redeemed child of God, starts with baptism and continues with communion. When we are joined with Christ we are a new creation. It has everything to do with God and nothing to do with our own power, skill or actions. When we live out our baptismal identity, all we do is to the glory of God. We fall short, so repentance and confession are also part of our living to Christ. Like Paul, we are to press on... scurrying away from danger, leaving our past behind, always moving toward God, the safety of a life in Christ. We are redeemed. Our task in life is to live up to it.

blessings to you from Pastor Karla