

“Identity Crisis”



A couple of weeks ago I was away attending the inaugural meeting of the East Central Ontario Regional Council of the United Church.

Upon arrival at the meeting, I was given this lovely name tag to wear. There's a lot of information packed on to a tiny 3"x3" card!

Throughout the three-day event I kept looking down at it and thinking, "how strange." Strange because it didn't seem to simply be a name tag. It seemed to be something more.

Printed on it was my name of course, but also my qualification as "ministry personnel" and "reverend." Below that was my "preferred pronouns" (In our gender malleable culture it's become customary to identify what gender you wish to be identified as). You can call me a "he," by the way! Below that it identifies where I'm from, "Selby Pastoral Charge – Selby and Empey Hill."

And that's not all! Tucked into my name tag was my voting card, indicating that I'm entitled to vote on all matters brought before the council, and two other cards – one red and one blue. These are called "hot" and "cold" cards, used to express my opinion about whether I am "hot" or "cold" toward a particular idea. It's a way for the council to gauge people's opinions without actually calling for a vote.

As I thought about it, this is how our culture deals with our identity. We attach to ourselves these identity markers, which determine our life's meaning and worth, based on our credentials, names, sexual identities and feelings and opinions. The only thing missing was my political affiliation and whether I was cheering for the Raptors or the Warriors!

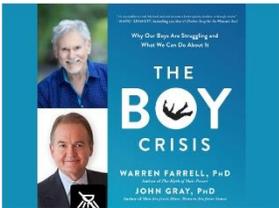
No wonder so many today are experiencing something of an identity crisis. Because in a "make-



your-own-identity” world, the options are pretty much endless. But so is the pressure to get it right. And then when we do settle on our unique identity, we feel a need to justify it. And outrage if anyone should question those boldly selected options.



For those of you who grew up in a different time, all of this may be a bit baffling. Maybe you’re from a time when you would have never considered these kinds of questions about your identity. Boys were boys and girls were girls, and everyone knew what that meant. But for today’s kids figuring out who you are and what you’re supposed to be is a whole different ball game.



I’ve been reading a book called, “*The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It.*”

The book caught my attention because this is not our normal cultural viewpoint. For decades we have recognized that it was girls who needed support. And naturally, we have invested in helping girls achieve their full potential.



There’s the House of Common’s standing committee for “Women and Girls in Sport.” The Canadian government has a department called “The Department for Women and Gender Equality,” which works to increase women's economic security and prosperity; encouraging women's leadership and democratic participation; and ending gender-based violence. - All important work to be sure.

And don’t get me wrong, I certainly see the need for advocacy for women in all of these areas, and there is much work yet to be done. But what the research is showing is that our boys are in crisis and no one seems to be noticing.

The Boy Crisis:

- Academics
- Employment
- Mental Health
- Physical Health

Today, boys are lagging behind girls in almost every significant area. Academics – In more than 70 developed

countries today boys will have less education than their fathers and they're falling behind girls in almost all academic areas.

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Employment – Today, boys have fewer socially accepted options for employment than their female counterparts. While society actively works to open doors for girls, boys are not being encouraged or supported to enter fields typically dominated by women. All the while, traditionally male dominated industries like manufacturing are disappearing.

The Boy Crisis:

- Academics
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Mental health – Depression, anxiety and suicide is on the rise in boys. Boys are three times more likely to have ADHD. And, boys are also more likely to be “boomerang kids” returning to live with their parents in adulthood.

The Boy Crisis:

- Academics
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Physical Health – boy's overall health is in decline. Due to rising child obesity, boys are expected to live shorter lives than their parents. But not only that, Male sperm production is declining in boys by 1.5% per year – Boys today are half as fertile as their grandfathers were.

What's behind the precipitous decline in boys? The authors of “The Boy Crisis” suggest many factors, but two stand out above all the others.

First, they see it as a lack of clear purpose for boys. And second, it's a lack of Dads – strong male role models in their lives.

In a different time, boys had a clear sense of mission and identity. For better or worse, they were to grow up to be the primary breadwinners for their family and they were to be the head of their household – just like their dads were! But that view is no longer accepted in our culture. And since men aren't sure how they fit into the family picture, more and more are simply

What are boys for?



opting out altogether, leaving mothers to do it all themselves. After all, what are boys for?

But, why should we as a church care about this? And, can we do anything about it?

Well, I think we should care. And here's why: boys who grow up without strong male role models and without a strong sense of purpose are statistically less empathetic, they are less able to be assertive, they are much more likely to struggle in school, they're more likely to "fail to launch" in life, they're more likely to be suicidal or homicidal, and they're more likely to spend time in jail. In short, this significant segment of our population is at risk. And I'm not sure that's the kind of world we want to live in.

Our society depends on us having strong boys who know who they are and why it matters.

And this brings us to our scripture text for today. John 14 is one of the most pivotal texts in the New Testament. Here, Jesus makes one of his most clear Christological statements about his identity, and then he tells us why it matters.

"If you know me, you will know my Father also...I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

- John 14:7 & 10



"If you know me, you will know my Father also...I am in the Father and the Father is in me." In other words, the God who created the universe and everything in it has come in Jesus so that you can know him.

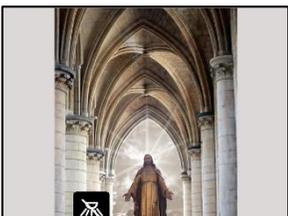
"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, in fact, will do greater works than these..."

- John 14:12



But now he gets to the crux of the matter. "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, in fact, will do greater works than these..."

You see, unlike our culture, Jesus just isn't that interested in the labels of identity. His name tag



doesn't outline his credentials, or his sexual identity, or his opinions on important matters.

From time to time there is speculation on these things, but Jesus defies all our narrow categories. Instead, Jesus' name tag points entirely to someone else; His Father in heaven. His purpose is to make God known.

See, as a culture we're told, in all kinds of ways, that life is about accruing the best identity we can. But, in trying to define ourselves as unique, autonomous, successful and free creatures we've negated our true purpose; to live in relationship with God and with one another.

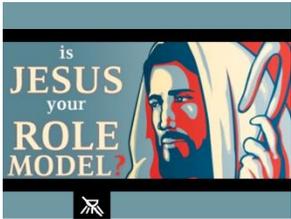
You were made for a purpose. We all were; Men and women. But when the culture says, "We don't really need boys," the natural order that God has built into creation is broken – and we all become broken.

So, what can we do about it? Well, as Christians we can see that our culture's current social ideological viewpoint isn't working very well. But luckily, there's an alternative. And so, this morning, looking out at this room full of really good dads and strong male role models I think we have an opportunity to show the world that another way is both possible and desirable.



You know, often when I'm meeting with a couple to officiate at their wedding, I ask them what positive and negative images of marriage they have? And, what role models do they have for their marriage. More often than not, they tell me that they want their marriage to be like their grandparent's. They want to grow old together, to honour one another, and feel a sense of purpose in their marriage. Role models matter, because they subtly impact culture by simply being the alternative.

How do we help our culture find its way? We be the strong faithful men God made us to be. And here's the thing. Being a father is not necessarily a biological thing. If we think of the fatherhood of God, we get a picture of someone who is strong and loving, and who sacrifices himself for those he loves. That's a picture of real fatherhood and real manhood.



This morning we see that Jesus gives us all a clear purpose. "Do the works that I do." And because of the uniqueness of men and women, we will live out that purpose differently. And that's okay. That's how God intends it. We are biologically different, complimentary, but different, just as God made us.

But let me be clear. This is not about returning to narrowly defined gender roles. It's not about men being the bread winners, while women stay home – that's a culturally formed idea from a different time. It is about having a clear sense of purpose and living it out through the unique set of gifts God gives us as gendered people.



Dr. Warren Farrell, one of the authors of the book "The Boy Crisis," tells a story about being at a party in 1976. A guy came up to him and asked, "Are you Warren Farrell?" "Yes," he replied. "Well, I was part of a men's group you formed some years ago, and I just wanted you to know that it changed my life."

When he asked why, the man replied, "One time during the discussion the question was asked, "What is the biggest whole in your heart." He said, "I didn't know the answer, but I blurted out I'm so involved in my career that I'm neglecting my family. I'm divorced, but now I've remarried, and my wife is expecting a boy." The group asked, "What would you like to do differently this time?" He said, "Actually, I'd like to take five years off and raise my son. So, I did."

“Good decision?” Warren asked. “No, the best decision of my life. Up until then my life had been all about me. Now, it’s all about something else. I’ve suddenly learned what it means to love and to be loved.”

Just then a guy walked up and said, “Sir, can I have your autograph?” Warren replied enthusiastically, “Sure!” “Sorry, no, I meant the other guy,” said the inquirer. “I guess your famous, I don’t own a TV, what’s your name?” Warren asked. “Lennon,” he replied, “John Lennon.”



John Lennon had discovered what it means to be a man. Not defined by narrow gender roles, and not defined by any other of the identity markers we pin to ourselves, but defined by self-sacrificing love.

Interestingly, according to Christianity Today Magazine, this time in Lennon’s life coincides with a time when he accepted faith in Jesus and became a Christian. That was a short-lived period, but it also appears to have been one of the healthiest times of his life.



For many, Father’s Day is a hard day. There are a lot of people who struggle in their relationships with their father’s, there are those who grieve the loss of their beloved dad. And there are some, who have gone through life without a father figure at all.

But I still think that Father’s Day is important. It’s no surprise to Christians that we live in a very broken world. But we can still celebrate the ideal that God wants for all of us. We can lift it up, so that our kids will know that Dads do matter. We need good dads; the world depends on it. Our boys depend on it.

What if we, as a church committed to raising our boys knowing that they have been given a unique purpose. To be Christlike in a way that is natural to them. “To make the Father

known," and "to do the works that he does." To love as our perfect heavenly Father has first loved us.

I think it would be the start of a different world.

Thanks be to God, Amen.