

“AND YOU ARE...?”

January 19, 2014



John 1:29-42

Last week we talked about whose we are – this week, WHO we are... Who are you and what are you looking for? ☛ Hopefully you received a nametag when you came in – anybody not get one? Don't write on it...not yet, anyway...Just peel it off and stick it in that note page in the bulletin; and think a little about what you could write in that white space.

☛ I love children's drawings. I still have the pictures little Miles gave me before Christmas. ☛ Here's a few portraits I found on line.... I especially like those pictures of families where the round yellow sun is shining on the square, brick-red house and everyone has a big smile on their face – sometimes even the sun and the dog are smiling! ☛ I've seen refrigerators so covered with artwork that you can't even see the fridge underneath!

Another thing kid's artwork can be good for is art therapy. Children's drawings can provide some very powerful insights into just who that child perceives himself or herself to be.

I discovered just *how* powerful some years ago when we were forced – I mean encouraged to do art therapy in the treatment center I was in. Afterward they explained what they were doing and we got to see some very real examples of some artwork from previous patients' children.

One of the counselors had asked a little boy, Eric, to draw a picture of his family. Eric's father was about halfway through the 30 day program. It was raining in the picture. Mom was taller than the house, and dad was shorter than both the mother and the house. A sister was holding the mother's hand. There were no smiles. And it seemed as though the boy was missing from the picture altogether.

We all wanted to know where Eric was. After all, it was a picture of his family. The counselor told us that she thought the same thing..., "I see your mom and your dad and your sister," she said to Eric, "but I don't see you. Why aren't you in the picture?"

☛ The boy pointed to a small black scribble in the corner of the drawing and said, "There I am!"

All of us, even the most hard-core alcoholics and addicts were quite taken aback when we heard that. This issue – this identity issue will be a struggle for Eric for the rest of his life. Imagine -- feeling like a little black scribble in the big picture that's supposed to be your life?

Maybe you don't have to imagine it. I think maybe a lot of us can relate first hand. Our struggle may not be quite as terrible as Eric's, but I don't think any of us can avoid asking ourselves at some point; "*Who am I -- really?*" I heard a member of another congregation who was retiring make the comment, "*Here I am getting ready to retire and I still don't really know what I want to be when I grow up!*" And this question is driven by that other question, "*Who am I?*" It's not really about **what** we want to be; it's about **who** we are. Next week we'll talk about that....

I was just watching the American Experience on PBS the other night. They were covering the year 1964 and one of the top-selling books of the year was *Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan.

☛ Flip through a Life Magazine from the mid-fifties and check out the ads for groceries, or washing machines and look at the pictures of the women.

Who remembers "Father Knows Best"? Then in the 70's "The Brady Bunch" was pretty shocking when it first came out. ☛ Two divorcees blending their families? The issue of personal identity has changed over the decades the same way fashion does – or technology – and it will continue to do so. At least in the secular world.

Our scripture this morning makes a strong statement about identity. It is quite clear on the identity of Jesus, the identity of John and the identity of a couple of John's – soon to be Jesus' followers. -- *and* if we will look closely -- the passage may even offer us a clue about our own identity.

When it comes to names of Jesus ☛ -- Master, Lord, King, - these names don't really mean anything to contemporary western society – especially here in the U.S.... I mean, what do I know about Kings and Lords? Master? Maybe a master trumpet player like Kevin; or you can have a master plumber or a master electrician right? I'm working on a Master's of Divinity – but what does that really mean? We don't have the Master/servant relationships that people used to have. There's no contextual understanding. Rabbi – means teacher -- at least I understand that one, but not the whole sitting around the teacher's feet as disciples. We don't even do that anymore.

But how important is Jesus' identity anyway? The author of the book of John – presumably the disciple John, not the baptizer John – tells us with no uncertain terms that Jesus is the Son of God...and the Lamb of God. And the messiah. But the important part I think is the part that comes next. Jesus is the Lamb of God – that takes away the sins of the world. This is what impacts our identities and here's how: Basically, Sin separates us from God. Sin means "to miss the mark" -- to fall short of our target. Sin keeps us from being all that we can be. And according to John the Baptist -- and John the author – Jesus takes away all that stuff that keeps me from becoming everything God made me to be!

Besides, if Jesus isn't the Son of God, then what in the world are we doing here?

Something else about Jesus – something that tells us a lot about his identity... When the two disciples start to following him, no questions asked, it's Jesus who turns to them and asks, Not "Who are you" or "What do you want?" or even "Why are you following me?" but "What are you looking for?" He stops what he's doing, and turns his full attention to two lost men who had interrupted him. You see, the interruptions like that become the mainstay of Jesus' mission.

Maybe we should think about that – while we're so busy doing the mission of the church, how many interruptions do we overlook? I have to think about how I get irritated when I'm in the office trying to work and someone comes in and interrupts me, asking for help.... Don't you think he would do the same for us?

Now, John's identity also becomes clearer in this passage. John is like "Look – over there!" I'm not the one – one greater than me is coming....Always drawing focus away from himself. ...Is that you?

What do you think John would say if we had the opportunity sit with him over coffee and locusts, say, and ask him "Who are you?"

"I am the one who came to announce the arrival of the messiah." What's the word? ...John is a herald. John's total identity is all about who he is in relation to Jesus the Christ. Secure in his identity, look what he did when his disciples left him for Jesus... Nothing. It's what he was born for.

Andrew, I'm pretty sure, is one of those two lost guys. Follower of John the Baptist, the moment John said Look it's the Lamb – Andrew was out of there! He and his friend followed Jesus like puppies, and one of the first things he did was run home to find his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. "Simon! Simon! Check it out! I found the Messiah -- Come and see!"

Andrew was always doing that. He found his purpose. The other two times we read about Andrew he's bringing someone to Jesus.... Could that be you?

Which brings us to Simon. Or should I say, Peter? I wonder what he thought when Jesus first called him by name without an introduction – but then said I'm going to call you 'Rock.' *Cepha* which translates to Petros. And that was the last time Peter was called Simon – the name given him by his parents. From then on he was Peter the Rock – called not by what he had done, but by what he would become. The Rock would crumble and require some reinforcement before he was through but Peter would eventually become the solid foundation of the Christian church. What would you be called if you had been named according to your potential? Maybe that's what you'll put on your sticker.

So the lives of everyone in today's passage were shaped by their relationship to Jesus. What about us? Is that true of those of us who so proudly call ourselves Christians? Is my life shaped by Christ? Is yours?

But wait a minute! Let's face it - I'm no John the Baptist, that's for sure! And you may not feel like Simon-Peter. But you might be a rock to somebody, right? You might not even know it. But you might be the person pointing the lost to Christ.

So much of scripture transcends time and geography though, doesn't it? We CAN find out more about who we are in almost any passage we choose. Sometimes I think that's what scripture is for... 'Cuz I'm not gonna let YOU determine who I am, no offense...

We can't let other people determine who we are; and we can't – or shouldn't -- try and do it by ourselves. We need guidance. We can discover ourselves, our true identity, in the presence of Christ, through scripture.

☛ Now – what are the first three things that pop into your head when I ask, "Who are you?" Don't tell me. I don't need to know. Write it down: "Who are you?"

Right off the top of your head, did you write your name? Maybe your occupation? Maybe that old familiar voice said something mean -- Don't listen to that one. Did you by any chance answer "I am a child of God?" "Beloved?"

Just like Andrew John and Peter, we can really discover who we are when we discover it in relationship with the God who made us.

When I was drinking I was the funniest guy in the room. My whole identity – my whole sense of self was determined by drinking or what drugs I was abusing.

☛ Like a goldfish in a bowl, we can only grow so much. We don't have to limit ourselves to our earthly environment. When we grow in Christ, we suddenly find out that there are no limits! ☛ This goldfish is gonna be huge!

Wouldn't it be great if children like Eric – all children, really -- could have a deep inner sense of being a child of God... beloved of God.

☛ And not a little black squiggle.

When I see myself illumined by the light of Christ, I feel empowered. I can ignore the demands of other people to be what they think I should be.

Eric didn't become a squiggle by himself. And he will need the love and encouragement to help him get a new identity. ☛ That's our job, and I pray that all the Eric's -- in here and out there -- will discover their true selves in the comforting and loving arms of the Lamb of God.

I found this video recently – you may have seen it on TV. It's only a minute long and it's supposed to be about optimism, but it really says volumes about how we see ourselves...take a look.