

Sermon 042918 Identity  
Scripture John 10: 22-30  
Sermon Title- Who Are You?

Who are you?

This is the question asked (in so many words) of Jesus in today's Gospel of John lesson. It is also the question that I pose to each one of us this morning. It is a jarring and some might say, a rude question. In *Alice in Wonderland*, the caterpillar said to Alice, "Who are you?" and her response was, "That is not an encouraging opening for a conversation, sir." The question is still not an encouraging opening for a conversation, but one that is still worth asking.

The great rock band 'The Who' had a big hit with the song entitled, "Who Are You?" The chorus is familiar, (singing) "Who are you? Who? Who? Who? Who?" Then Roger Daultry sings with aggression, "I really wanna know!" The question is almost designed to make you feel uncomfortable.

The gracious question is of course, "How are you?" We ask it of everyone every day. We would be horrified if anyone took the trouble to answer it fully and completely. If people started answering fully, we would have to find a new question. The question "How are you?" is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is meant to get us into a conversation, with the expectation that we will move into a more interesting topic or a more interesting person, whichever appears first.

The question that I have for you and for me, however, is “Who are you?” It is a question that demands an answer, and maybe even an explanation. Few of us would feel unchallenged when the question is put to us.

The question, when put to Jesus, was challenging and it was meant to be, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” (John 10: 24) Jesus response was direct. The last line of his response was, “I and the Father are one.” (10: 30) His answer was, ‘Yes, I am the Christ.’ His listeners immediately picked up stones in order to stone him. This identity stuff can be dangerous business. It appears that the questioner could have been a good lawyer. He already knew how Jesus would respond. He, and the others present didn’t believe Jesus was the Christ and did not like his claim to it. They wanted to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus answered truthfully when asked, “Who are you?” That remains, a powerful question for us to be asked and maybe we should be asking it of ourselves. In order to answer the question, “Who are you?” we must be truthful with ourselves.

Now, there is something that is stuck in my craw. I don’t know where or even what my craw is, but I’ve got something stuck in it. I’m hoping that talking about it might unstuck it for me. It may end up sticking in your craw, if so I apologize, but at least I’ll be done with it.

This is a church story but it has nothing to do with Union Church. Some years ago, Meg and I attended a dinner given in honor of a clergy

friend of ours so to celebrate his 10-year, quite successful ministry, at that church. The dinner was held at the swankiest function hall in the area. That church has a mix of members in education levels, levels of affluence, and levels of power. The hall was full, but many of the church weren't there for various reasons, but some couldn't afford the ticket price. Also worthy of note is that the church is well known for its extraordinary mission and charity work. Something like 18% of all the money that comes in goes to mission and charity. It is a good church with good people, many whom have dedicated their lives to doing God's work.

The program began after the meal. The emcee is a professor at a Law School in Boston. He introduced each speaker with a review of the speaker's credentials... 'So and so is a lawyer with this list of accomplishments or so and so is a doctor of distinction...' Both Meg and I became increasingly uncomfortable at the self-congratulatory tone. The tone was, 'aren't we grand' when there were humble folks (many who are most active in the church missions) who stayed home. He made a church that we believe not to be elitist sound elitist.

I was sitting there becoming more annoyed and more embarrassed for my minister friend who was the guest of honor. I was thankful not to be invited to the podium. If I were, I would have told the following story that came to me as I listened to the high and mighty proclamations. When Queen Victoria of England died, her casket was in procession up

the front steps of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The doors to the great cathedral were closed. The man leading the casket had a large staff, which he used to rap in the great doors. A voice from within said, "Who approaches?" The man called out, "Victoria, Queen of England, this of York, that of Wales," and on down the long list of her credentials. The voice from within shouted, "No room!" The man rapped again, "Who approaches?" was asked again. Same thing, the queen's accomplishments and credentials were listed. "No room!" again was the response. A third rap, "Who approaches?" This time the answer was, "Victoria, servant of God." The doors opened wide and the casket brought into the cathedral.

I believe that the august crowd in that fancy function room could have used that story that night. Your credentials do not speak to your worth. I'll tell you another thing; I'll take a hundred Union Church suppers in the Vestry before I go back to another church function like that one.

I want to be clear. I have great respect for people who show excellence in their given field. Accomplishment should be recognized and celebrated. But what you do for work and even how you do your work does not define who you are.

Who are you? We are not, you and I, defined exclusively by what we have done, where we have been, what we have experienced and accomplished, nor are we defined even by where we are. Instead, as

Psalm 23 reminds us, we are defined by where we are going. That to which we aspire defines us.

Who are you? A Christian response is, “I am a follower of Jesus Christ.” I am in process, I am a pilgrim, I am on a journey, on the way, on the road. I have stumbled. I have wandered off the path and gone in the wrong direction at times. But I am pursuing the way of the Lord. The purpose of my life is the purpose and praise of God. I am headed to great and good things. I have found redemption in the crucified Christ and in the glory of his resurrection. I am moving in that light and toward that light. I have been baptized into Christ and have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.

Who are you? Surely I am what I do, in part, and I am where I come from in part, I am what others see and expect of me, in part. I am part of all of that and all of that is part of me. I have at times thought of myself as better than I am and at times I have felt myself as worse than I am. But the good news, the gospel, is that there is more to it than that and therefore more to you and to me than all that. We are more than what we have done, much more. Our titles say nothing of our worth.

I am somebody of worth because I am made in the image of God. I am somebody of worth because I am a child of God. Jesus is the Christ and as his follower I have bought into that enterprise. I am not bound and limited by the past. I am a creature of great expectations because I follow the resurrected Christ. I aspire to abundant life. I aspire to the

wholeness of joy. I aspire to a life that is greater than the sum of its parts, a life lived in God's light.

Who are you? Let me suggest that you are:

Formed by God,

A follower of Christ,

Nourished by His love,

Preserved by His mercy,

Open to His promises,

Aspiring to His future,

You are the human expression of the Divine hope.

You are God's best and last chance in the world,

You are God's vessel of hope and love in the world.

Who are you?

You are all that and more.

You are a child of God,

And for that, we thank and praise God.

AMEN