

Message: "Who Am I?"

Today we continue our journey through Lent as we head to Easter. So I want to throw out this idea. It's that you only really have one journey in life and that is to discover who you really are! And I want to suggest you that often this journey is the forgotten way. We often forget that we are made in the image of God and that we can only discover who we really are in relationship to Him as our Creator. God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah, (1:5)

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart."

How amazing is that? You began as a thought in the mind of God, long before you were actually born.

In Genesis Chapter 1 we read that God creates a lifeless environment and then he speaks into that environment, and life comes forth which lives and moves and has a being. God talks to this environment that he created. He speaks to the water. *"Let the waters swarm with fish and other life"*. He speaks to the earth, *"Let the earth produce every sort of animal."* But when God creates us the language changes. He speak to himself. Genesis 1:26, *"Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us."* He creates you from a purposed intention of his heart. That's why the apostle Paul reminds us in Acts 17:28.

"In him we live and move and have our being" (NIV).

The first chapters of the book of Genesis is the origin of that moment. So let's go to our creation. You know the story. God creates the first man and women. Then the serpent comes to Eve and says to her. *"If you and Adam eat the fruit from the forbidden tree you can become like God."* ! But the problem is they were already like God. They were already made in his image. But the serpent tries to convince her that she and Adam didn't have what they already had and so they decided to disobey God and ate the forbidden fruit.

The serpent actually uses the same tactic on us. He says to us, in effect, you can try to obtain by your actions, what you already have by grace. He messes with our identity, because he knows that our actions can never earn us our salvation. Satan tactic is to blind you to the reality of the origin of yourself. To blinds you to the identity that God has already given you since the creation of the world.

The problem is, that when you are blind to what you already have, and you try to work for it, you can never work hard enough. You can never get there

on your own. It's impossible. Salvation is faith based, not action based. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, and in that moment, they turn to one another and they have a strange realization. We're naked. And suddenly guilt and shame grabs hold of them. They go and sew fig leaves together, and the fashion industry is born!

God shows up, and he asks two questions. "*Adam, where are you?*" Now when God asks you a question like that it isn't because he doesn't know where you are. Right? If God can't find you are really lost! Adam says. "*I was hiding because I was naked and I was afraid*". Here comes the second question. God says, "*Who told you that you were naked?*"

That word "*naked*" is an interesting word. It literally means, "*You are lacking*". So God's question really is, "*Who convinced you that you are lacking in anything?*" Isn't it true that when you are lacking, you think you need to fill things up for yourself?

You see, in communion with God, you lack nothing. David, the Psalmist, understands that in Psalm 23, verse 1. "*The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything that I need.*" In other words, with God I lack nothing. In chains and in prison, the apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament, Philippians 4:12-13,

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation . . . I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

With Christ we lack nothing, but the perception that we are naked, that we lack things, drives us into sin and materialism and all kinds of foolishness. We forget we are made in the image of God, and so we strive to be gods in our own lives. In practical term, we try to live not by faith, but to work to earn our salvation.

Now let's fast forward to the New Testament. Jesus, after the Passover supper, is in the garden of Gethsemane praying. He isn't pleading with God to save us. That was already in God's mind. Second Corinthians 5:19 says,

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them."

In the Garden, when Jesus is speaking to the Father, he steps into our story. Whenever you engage in someone else life you step into their story, don't you? But here's the thing. It's like stepping into a book of someone else's life. You shouldn't judge the chapter you step into as being the whole story of someone's life. You have to recognize that your involvement in their story

might simply be intended to help them to one day write the final chapter so their life finishes well. So Jesus steps into our story. In the Garden, he says to Father God, *"I want your will to be done, not mine."* (Matthew 26:39) That is actually the reverse of what happened in the first garden in Genesis when we said, in effect, *"God, I want my will to be done, not yours"*. Jesus prays the opposite, and in doing so he restore things to God's original intention.

Now we say that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but he didn't die just for you - he died as you. He wasn't just buried for you - he was buried as you. He wasn't just raised for you - he was raised as you. Now maybe you are thinking. That's ridiculous, Neal. It was 2000 years ago that Jesus died and rose. I wasn't there? But listen to Galatians 2:20. Paul writes the words the Holy Spirit gave him:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Let's personalize that. Jesus is saying to us. *"You got crucified with me and you no longer live, I live in you."* Jesus says, "You are alive in me." That's great news. It means, you don't have to define yourself by yourself. You don't have to define yourself by the labels other people put on you. You can define yourself, says Jesus, by who I am in you, and by who you are in me! You define yourself by who I say you really are.

But think about it, who do we ask when we want to know who we are? We ask mum and dad, friends, our boss, our coach, we sometimes we even ask the mirror. But ultimately, you are never going to find the answer to who you are until you ask Jesus, because it is he who defines you. Jesus on the cross reconciles us to himself. God in Christ reconciles us to himself. How? Scripture says, *"by no longer counting (our) sins against us."*

Let's go to the resurrection story. John Chapter 20. The disciples are living in fear. Meeting in a locked room. And Jesus suddenly appears. He says to them (John 20:19 &21) *"Peace be with you"*. He says it twice. Not a bad idea when you have just appeared in a locked room to a bunch of very scared people who think you are dead! Then he says, verse 20, *"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."* Jesus is giving you the same mandate God gave him. The same Spirit. The same power. Then he breathes on them the Holy Spirit. Wow!

God only breathes twice in the Bible. Once in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:7 where we read, *"(God) breathed the breath of life into the man's*

nostrils, and the man became a living person." That's the first time. The second time is right here, after his resurrection, when he breathes out the Holy Spirit upon us. With that resurrection breath, God restores us to our original intention. Second Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV),

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

You are a new creation. A new creation by its very nature has never been seen before. You are not a replica of the past. You are not an upgrade. You are not a fixer upper. You are "a new creation." You are created to be the home of the presence of God and, folks, remember this, God loves where he lives!

When He steps into your story and made you a new creation, He brought his glory, His purity, and His righteousness with him, and the result is that you are more forgiven, more loved, more accepted, than you will ever know. That's how radical God's grace is! He's made his home in us! We don't think about this very much because it is such a mystery to us, such an awesome thought. But we are filled with the fullness of God. Listen to Jesus, John 14:20:

"When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

In order for you to know who you really are only requires you to know who He has always known you to be – his child. You don't work for it, you surrender to it. You don't get the gospel, the gospel gets you. Once you hear the gospel, you can't un-hear it. You can only let it mature within you.

Let me ask you? How much sin did the blood of Jesus on the cross take away? That's right, all of it! So only one question is left for us to answer. How surrendered to the Holy Spirit will we be? And to answer that we just need to know that he has chosen to make his home in us. To cause us actually be one with him, so His love and glory and righteousness will shine through us. That's why you're alive. You are meant to be his eternal home. In John 17:22-23 Jesus says,

²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me"

This is the goodness of the gospel. It's better than you ever thought. You may come here every week thinking you are messed up and broken, but that's NOT how God sees you. He knows you've just forgotten is light shines in you. But God's purpose from your creation, and God's love, redefines who

you have ever thought you are. So remember who you are on this Lenten journey!

Pastoral Prayer

Creator and Life- Giving God,
Hear our prayers today for all those who,
feel broken, and discarded, and worthless.

Help us to speak into their lives,
the good news that they are made in your image,
and that you love them deeply.

Hear our prayers today for all those
who have lost their way in life,
and who live without purpose and without hope.

Help us to speak into their lives
the good news that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life
and the one who restores our hope
and gives us a sense of purpose.

Here our prayers today for every person
who is the victim of bullying, racism, abuse or prejudice.

Help us to speak into their lives
the good news that the labels others place on us
do not define us,
because you define us, O God,
and your Spirit testifies to us
that we are your beloved children.

We pray today for our Church and for our community,
and especially for those in special need of prayer today.

In silence, Lord, we now name those persons before you
and ask you to touch them with your healing grace.
(Silence)

We pray all these things in Jesus Name. Amen.