

"Who Are You?"

1 Peter 2:2-10

May 10, 2017

5th Sunday of Easter

Back in the 1960's, much time and energy was expended by many people "to find themselves" (as the old saying goes.) They wanted to know the answer to questions such as, "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "What's my purpose in life?" I thought this kind of soul-searching might be just a nostalgic remnant of a weird time in American history until I googled it and found that these questions are still being asked. There dozens of tests, quizzes, and inventories that you can download which will help you "know your true self" and "realize your true identity."

So the question comes to you. Who are you? You could answer, "I am (name)." Or, I am an American, a Christian, a Lutheran, a Republican, a Democrat, a man, a woman, a boy, a girl, and so on. But do any of those labels really describe the essence of who you really are? How does God view you? Who are you, as far as God is concerned (and His opinion is ultimately the only one that really counts)?

First of all, each of us is a creature of God. Each of us has been made by our Creator in the image of God. We are not mammals who have evolved more highly than other animals. In addition, each of us is dearly loved by God. We are not ornaments or decorations in God's grand and glorious efforts at creating a universe. All in all, that's pretty special.

However, thanks to our first parents, Adam and Eve, we've blown up that identity and exchanged it for another identity – that of a sinner. Now, most people will admit to being a sinner insofar as we all do bad things from time to time and don't always do all the good things that we should.

But our identity as sinner is much worse than that. According to the Word of God, the sin of Adam and Eve has been passed down from generation to generation until it has been inherited by each of us like some deadly disease. Sin becomes more than something we do. Sin becomes something we are. We have lost the image of God in which we were created and find ourselves to be enemies of a holy and angry God.

But that has changed. That is who we were. Who are we now? That question is best answered by asking another identity question. And that question is this: Who is Jesus Christ? In Jesus' time, many thought He was simply a good moral teacher, a fine prophet, a provider of goods and services, and so on. Today, many have similar ideas about Jesus. However, if that is ALL that Jesus is – a prophet with a new religious philosophy and a program to feed, heal, and clothe the less fortunate, that cannot change our identity. We are still sinners under the wrath of God. We may be religious sinners and helpful sinners but we are still sinners.

But Jesus is much more than that. When asked who Jesus is, Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is not simply some overzealous follower of Jesus making too big of a deal about Him. At His trial, when the high priest put Jesus under oath and asked Him directly, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus replied, "Yes, I am." That identity is important for it is able to change our identity. The seasons Lent and Easter shows how this is possible.

The season of Lent shows us that Jesus, the Son of the living God, is only the Savior from sin and death. We spent the forty days of Lent meditating on the fact that Jesus took all sin – your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world – from us and put it on His shoulders. He endured the wrath of God against sin and suffered the punishment for sin in our place on the cross. He offered the final and complete once-and-for all sacrifice for sin. We are forgiven for all of our sin and freed from death as a punishment for sin.

But, wait, there's more. The season of Easter shows us that Jesus, the Son of the living God, is also the Victor over death and hell. We are spending the fifty days of Easter celebrating the fact that Jesus rose from death and the grave to validate all of His work for us on the cross. By coming back to life, Jesus proves God's promises to be true and effective. If God can raise Jesus from the

dead, then He can do all that He has promised. All of our sins HAVE been forgiven. Death is no longer a punishment for sin but an entrance into eternal life. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is also God's guarantee of our future resurrection from our graves and our life with Him in heaven forever.

Jesus' identity as Son of God – the Savior from sin and death and Victor over death and hell completely transforms us and gives each of us a new identity. Who are you now? St. Peter tell us in our text for today.

You are a "chosen race". You are not an evolutionary accident or an isolated individual to fend for yourself. You have been individually chosen by God to be a member of His people. He has given you the gift of faith to receive His other gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. You have become His sons and daughters, loved and supported by Him and one another.

You are a "royal priesthood". This is a stunning designation here. You are not ordinary people, but you are royalty. You are royalty because you live in service to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as His sons and daughters.

As princes and princesses, you are also priests. A priest is one who is a go-between between the people of God and God Himself. A priest approaches God on behalf of the people and to bring sacrifices for sin to God. A priest also comes to the people of God on behalf of God and to bring the gifts of God to the people. In the Old Testament, this duty was designated to a special class: the descendants of Levi.

However, since Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, approached God on behalf of people, sacrificed Himself on the cross for all sins, and distributed His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the waters of Holy Baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion, there is no need to have a separate priestly class. You can approach God directly, not through a priest, to receive His gifts and offer a sacrifice of praise.

You are "a holy nation." Simply put, you are the people of God. "Holy" here does not mean morally perfect. Rather, holy refers to being "set apart" or "dedicated." You are the nation that "is wholly separated from the unholy and dedicated to God." (Lenski, p.102) This aptly applies to Peter's audience of scattered believers and to us as well. Although we come from many different national and ethnic backgrounds, spiritually we form "a distinct, 'holy', superior, and exalted nation." (Lenski, p.102). We are foreigners among the common earthly nations that surround us. Let us give up the desire to be like other people because, as a holy nation, we aren't like them. And thank God for that.

Finally, you are "a people for his own possession." You and I, despite our flaws and failures, are His treasure. Why would He treasure creatures who have so often failed Him? Why would He offer the life of His only Son to possess people such as us? There is no reason or explanation for this. We have not earned nor have we deserved the special statuses described here. God owes us nothing. However, it is His nature to love. "God is love" the Scriptures say. In other words, He loves because that is who He is and what He does. You are His treasure and He values you more than anything in all of creation; indeed, more than all of creation itself.

Our identity, in Christ, is truly awesome and amazing. But "it would be a mistake to suppose that we can be all that Peter states and at the same time sit down quietly and contemplate our honor and our excellence." (Lenski, p 102) These descriptions of who we are carry along with them a sense of purpose – why we are here, how we are to live and what we are to do.

So, Peter tells us that we are chosen to be kings and priests, set apart and valued by God "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." By God's grace we have been brought out of spiritual darkness in which the world now exists under the control of the prince of darkness. Also, by God's grace, we have been brought into the light of truth, life, and blessedness which are found in His kingdom of grace. "Instead of hiding the fact that we are foreigners in this world, we proclaim it and tell with delight who has made us what we are and how He has done what He did." (Lenski, p.104) This is more joy than duty as we see

God rescuing more and more from the darkness of sin, death, and hell and into the light of holiness, life, and heaven through the proclamation we make.

Peter sums up all our identity issues this way, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." At one time, you had no identity at all; you were not a people. But now you have the greatest identity of all; you are God's people. At one time, you had none of God's gifts; you had not received mercy. But now you have received all of God's gifts; you have received mercy by all of its various means in all of its various forms.

So, my fellow chosen people, kingly priests, citizens of a set apart nation, and valuable treasures of God, rejoice and proclaim His praises! For that is your identity. That is who you are. That is why you are here. It is your purpose in life. So, live it! Amen.