

“Come, Follow Me Home: Identity”
Matthew 3:13-17

Today we begin the journey of Lent and of walking with Jesus to Jerusalem to the cross. The invitation of this journey is to pay attention to our souls and that the journey is ultimately leading us to return to our eternal home. We come from eternity, and we return from eternity. The challenge is to live here on earth without forgetting that eternal home. And so today we will focus on identity. **Who are we in light of eternity?**

How do you normally introduce yourself to others? It is often dependent on the context. If we are at a grocery store, we would keep things short. If we are at a family gathering, we may talk about our family connections. If we are at a work meeting, we may talk about credentials. But ultimately, there is a sense that who we are is limited to our role in society. Even in church, we can get stuck on our roles. I have been to many new member gatherings when people are asked to introduce themselves. They would often go around the room telling how long they had been members of the church and how the church has meant so much to them. But the room would often get quiet when people are asked to talk about their relationship with Jesus, their spiritual identity, or their discipleship. It is much easier to speak about belonging to an organization, a group of people, than to talk about our identity in Christ.

As important as our roles may be, they are only a part of the picture of who we are. They also end up limiting our ability to thrive because we often measure our success in these roles by the standards of society and not by the eternal standards of God.

On this journey with Jesus, we are invited to reclaim our eternal identity as beloved children of God. We look at the example of Jesus in his experience of baptism and remember how his eternal identity as a beloved child of God shaped, sustained, and renewed his life. This was proclaimed at his baptism.

As we hear about the baptism of Jesus, we also hear about his cousin John the Baptist and how he invited people to repent and go back to true worship of God. Scholars struggle with this story as they try to explain that Jesus was not sinful and that he didn't really need to be baptized. There are all of kinds of explanations out there about that.

I think the key in this text is the phrase to "fulfill all righteousness." Jesus submits not because of any need to repent of sin but rather to "fulfill all righteousness." The word "righteousness" carries different meanings. For many Christians, the word evokes thoughts of personal piety and the state of one's "soul" or "conscience" before God. In Greek and Hebrew (the languages of the Bible), "righteousness" signifies God's saving action in the world. One might even translate the Greek word for righteousness (*dikaionun*) as "justice." According to Thomas Long, righteousness shows God's passionate commitment to set right the things that are wrong. Thus, Jesus' submission to John's baptism is no simple act of personal piety. On the contrary, Jesus discerns that John's baptism and fiery preaching constitute a revolutionary declaration about a new world order where God will set right all that the establishment (in Jerusalem and Rome) has corrupted.

Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, to fulfill God's justice in the world. This is what we are called to do in our baptism. This is our true vocation in life. Baptism is about claiming our vocation, who we are before God, who we are in the realm of justice seeking. This is the mystery of our baptism. In his baptism, Jesus declares the purpose of his life, to join God's mission of justice in the world. Baptism is about claiming our identity as God's beloved who are concerned with living a life of love, privately and publicly. In baptism we begin the journey of discovering and living our vocation in life.

Here is a video by Rachel Held Evans about baptism:

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/named-beloved>.

One of the hardest questions in life is: Why am I here? What is my special purpose in life? This is hard to answer because we live in a world where there are expectations of us. We need to make money and be successful. We need to have meaningful relationships. We have to have our act together in life and that takes a lot of energy. According to the way of Jesus, we are all here to give and receive love, but our work in life is to discover our unique ways of doing that. In baptism we are claimed by name because each of one of us is unique and special to God in our own way. As we journey with God in life, if we are able to pay attention to the eternal in our daily lives, we can see our vocation. By vocation, I don't mean a job or a social status because these are only parts of the big picture of who we are. Occupations are incidental to our calling.

A young woman was joining a church and the pastor asked her, "What do you do for a living?" And with a sly smile, she looked at him and said, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ secretly disguised as a legal secretary." Isn't that wonderful? I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ carefully disguised as a carpool mom. As a financial advisor. As a bank teller. Or even as a McDonald's hamburgerologist. Knowing our deeper calling in life can make a great difference in how we go about our daily life.

Mother Teresa was once asked by a reporter, "What is your biggest problem?" Mother Teresa answered with one word: "Professionalism." She said, "Here are these servants of Jesus who care for the poorest of the poor. I have one who just went off and came back with her medical degree. Others have come back with registered nurse degrees. Another with a master's in social work, and when they come back with their degrees, their first question always is, "Where is my office?" Then she said, "But you know what I do? I send them over to the House of the Dying where they simply hold the hands of dying people for six months, and after that, they're ready to be servants again."

Our identity in Christ is about connecting with the eternal in our day-to-day life. We are God's beloved and when we forget that we lose our way and we suffer greatly. In baptism, we are reminded of who we are.

This week, I invite you to ask yourself each day, "In light of eternity, who am I today?" I pray that you will remember the words Jesus received at his baptism: You are God's child, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased. Amen.