

Becoming Who You Are
1 Peter 1:18-21
July 7, 2019

When we meet someone for the first time it is usually the case that we ask him or her what they do for a living. *So John, nice to meet you, and what is it you do?* These days we are often defined by our work. If we happen to be retired and asked this question it may become much more difficult to describe who we are. The retired person might simply respond that they are busier than ever doing this and that. So even when we have long ago stopped work and retired we still try to identify ourselves as people who **do** certain things, whether work or leisure.

In our reading from Peter this morning we see a different description of what identifies us as Christians.

Let's get one thing out of the way from the start. We are not Christians because we try to keep the imperatives in the bible: keep the commandments, love your neighbour, be holy, attend church regularly, don't cheat on your taxes, tithe, be compassionate toward the weak and the poor, and stop at every red light, and so on. No, the Christian lives out the imperatives of the Gospel **because** he/she is a Christian. Keep the golden rule and you will be considered a good person. Well, yes, you will be rightly considered a kind, good person. But that has nothing to do with whether or not you are a Christian.

Here is one of the central descriptions of our new identity: *You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors.* These Christians scattered over Asia Minor are mainly gentiles who used to live lives devoted to the gods and traditions of their tribe, family and empire. These gods and family traditions defined their moral, spiritual framework. But now as Christians something extraordinary has occurred. They have been rescued from their ancient family practices and superstitions. They have been ransomed!

What does this mean?

N.T. Wright offers this illustration to explain this to our modern ears. A

man, lets call him John, goes into a junk shop to try to find a bowl to hold his beautiful ornamental eggs.

He sees an old, dirty bowl sitting on a shelf that had obviously been used to hold dirt and flowers. It has a crack and it's still dirty with remnants of the soil and leaves. John fishes it out of the jumble of items on the shelf, disguises his delight as he walks up to the till to buy it. He takes it home, cleans it carefully and repairs the crack. He realized when he saw it, which the shop owner obviously didn't, that it was a fine piece of porcelain. Once completed, he placed the eggs in the bowl and set it in a prominent place in his living room.

Now lets imagine that the original owner came back to the shop and asked to have the bowl back. He would send him to John who bought it and ask to buy it back from him. But John has cleaned and repaired it and it now is exactly what he wanted to hold his eggs. So he refuses.

That is exactly what God has done for us. We are like that bowl, in need of cleaning out and repaired. Like the bowl we have been bought back. Yes, from all our futile family and tribe traditions that once were held dear is what God has rescued us from. We really didn't know what we had been made for before this transformation. Now in Christ by faith we see life differently. But it was not with money we were purchased. It was with the precious life of Messiah, Jesus Christ. Or as Peter puts it: *not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.*

Let's use our imagination and see if we can conjure up what is in Peter's mind as he writes these words about ransom and a lamb offered up in sacrifice. Surely he is thinking of the Passover lamb offered up in Egypt to protect the children of Israel from the angel of death. Every year since that night Israel has celebrated their freedom from slavery by eating the Passover lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. He may also have been thinking of the Isaiah 53 prophecy of the suffering servant who will bear our infirmities and will carry our diseases. He will be like a lamb led to the slaughter, Isaiah says

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This, says Peter, is what Christ has done for us. He has bought us back, cleaned us up, and brought us back to God's original intention for the human family. Bought back to be in relationship with God.

As Christians we have this new identity. Christ's life, death and resurrection have secured this. At the very centre of our lives as a Christians there lies this realization, namely that we are totally indebted to Christ for saving our lives. Faith in his work of redemption has made a life of discipleship not only possible, but also a delight and joy. Christ's love and life have changed the Christian's outlook on life and established a whole new way of looking at the world and self. We have been cleaned up and restored to our original purpose.

So having been purified we have been given hearts obedient to the truth. Love now marks our lives together in community, Peter says. We have been born anew:

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

This living Word of God in Scripture now shapes our lives. It is this good news that forms the basis of our new identity in Christ. It is this Gospel that we have responded to.

As Christians living within Western society and whose moral and spiritual standards are at best confused, we would do well to heed Peter's advice. As obedient children we need to remember that we have left behind our former way of life with its desires and muddled thinking.

It is in the midst of our modern world, with its skewed priorities and

futile search for meaning and hope that we are to live out of new identity. In such a world of relativism, materialism and consumerism, we surely can no longer live as if we were no different from those whose lives are enslaved by these powerful forces. In short, a Christian is a person who has experienced a gigantic shift in the way she thinks, a change of heart that results in a change of attitude toward our neighbour. Becoming who I am as a Christian means nothing less than a fundamental change in my behaviour toward others and a shift toward loving God

Our Christian journey is one in which we are becoming who we are. Society is not only confused about the meaning of life, they have got it all wrong. As Christ reminds us, finding our lives means losing them for the kingdom's sake. Society thinks in reverse. They think that if they gain more of everything they will find life. In fact they lose their very souls in this pursuit. So know who you are and live accordingly!

Amen