

Scripture Readings

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Who Am I?

If you were to ask me who I am I would tell you - I'm a minister, a woman, a canadian, a daughter, a sister, an auntie, a fiancee, and the list goes on. Just like you I am many things. Our first responses likely should be "I am a child of God, created in God's image." We like Jesus are many things to many people. There are many ways to understand who Jesus is. Some people are very concerned about getting this exactly right. I on the other hand feel God is likely less worried about us having the exact right Christology and more interested in how we live our lives in relationship with one another, the holy and the earth. When Jesus asks "Who do you say that I am?" he invited us to define our relationship with him. When I define myself each part of the definition involves a relationship. When Jesus asks "Who do you say that I am?" he invites us to define our relationship with him, and to consider what we will do in response to that relationship. The question invites us to consider not only who he is, but who we are in relationship with him.

All of our life and faith is about relationship. Paul defines our relationship with other christians as a body. Kate Huey reflected on these passages by noticing that "In a culture that seems to encourage, or even to require, spending exorbitant amounts of money and time on our physical comfort, health, and appearance, we still seem to suffer from a severe lack of appreciation for our bodies. As Paul builds on his theology in his Letter to the Romans, he does a "therefore" that exhorts us to consider our bodies as "living sacrifices," living, breathing, dynamic offerings to God (the word "sacrifice" is rooted in words that mean "to make sacred"), not dead offerings but offerings still capable of transformation, of dramatic, life-altering change that brings into being God's vision for us, God's intention for us, God's hope for us. But Paul means more than our bodies; he refers to our entire being, all of us, being transformed by the power of God.

Today, in our culture, if we conform to the world around us, we think we can expend a lot of effort (and time and money) into "making something" of ourselves, improving our looks, our minds, our habits, but Paul exhorts us to remember who it is who is really at work in our lives and by what power we are truly transformed. We can read all the self-help books we want, watch Dr. Phil, join health clubs, and search the Internet for valuable tips on self-improvement, but it is the same God who put the stars in the sky and called the planets into being, the same God who shaped us in secret, in our mother's womb. The words "self esteem" in our culture ...have taken on a distorted importance...It's refreshing to read Eugene Peterson's translation of this familiar passage ... "The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what [God] does for us, not by what we are and what we do for [God]" (*The Message*)."¹

I have struggled for years to equate scripture and my faith life with the individualistic culture in which we live. The need for community has been diminished and overcome by the desire for

¹ <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/august-21-2011-twenty-first-s.html>

power and individual values, needs and wants. I agree that every person is important and valuable as an individual and a child of God but without community, relationship and love we become lost. We need to find the balance between individual respect and essential connectedness and relationship. I often wonder how our culture would be transformed if we began to see what was best for everyone as a whole. If we began to lift up the gifts and values of others rather than of ourselves.

“Paul calls us to a profound appreciation for the beauty and workings of a body whose parts function together, each with its own role and importance. In the same way, we are all part of the Body of Christ, each with our own gifts and abilities and our own important role in the unfolding of the Realm of God. John Dominic Crossan has written extensively about Paul's contrast between the Roman Empire and the Realm of God, the former staking its glory on peace through victory, the latter holding out the dream of peace through justice. (*One excellent book of Crossan's, written with the biblical archaeologist, Jonathan L. Reed, is In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Roman's Empire with God's Kingdom.*) Instead of being consumed with one's own interests and needs...Put yourself out there for the sake of something else and someone else, and lay your gifts on the altar of justice." It is a different way of thinking of sacrifice than the ancient cultures had, but Paul is urging his readers, then and today, not to conform to the thoughts and ways around them.”²

I wonder what your response would be if I were to ask you how are you a gift to others? How do you live so that not only your life but the lives of those around you might be transformed? Do you seek a world of transformation? Do you long for a better world? Do you search for community and abundant relationship? How have others participated in your transformation? How has your faith and the gospel transformed you? How has this church community transformed you? How is the Still-speaking God calling this church to new life, to a renewed and transformed existence?

When Jesus asked “Who do you say that I am?” The disciples were called to recognize the relationship Jesus had with The Holy, with them and with all of creation. In that moment they were also called upon to recognize who they were in relation to God, others and all of creation. Jesus is not interested in your individual power, prestige and importance he is interested in your life, your living. When we offer our lives as a living sacrifice it is not about giving something up rather it is about offering new life, joy and abundance. What if when we heard the word sacrifice we heard an offering of something living and joy-filled?

Peterson wrote "Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering." How might this be a sacrifice, a "making sacred" of our lives, very different from a painful "giving up" but much more likely to lead us to a wholly different way of being, a transformation of our whole lives?

Jesus asked “Who do you say that I am?” Today we are called to ask “Who am I?” Who has God created me to be? Who am I in relation to this world, this church, this faith. God has created this world to be in relationship. We are the foundation of what is life giving and

² IBID

transforming in this community and beyond. So when you ask yourself “Who am I?” Let me encourage you today to discover in a new how you can present yourselves as a holy sacrifice. So that you may be a life-giving, abundant gift to all you encounter.

may we so live.

Amen.

Our Small Difference

by John van de Laar

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1. We may not be able to confront queens, or challenge presidents; We may not have the capacity to divert resources, or uplift communities; We may not have the voice to silence the noise of war, or the words to negotiate peace between armies; But, as we follow you, O Christ, we are able to do something. And so, we pray that you would inspire us to commit to and act on the small difference we can make: May we bring peace through small acts of gentleness and reconciliation; May we bring wealth through small contributions and collaborations; May we bring safety through small acts of consideration and acceptance; May we bring wholeness through small acts of care and service. And in the small ways, O God, may our small difference make a big contribution to your saving work in our world. Amen.
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