

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

Advent 3B; John 1:6-8, 19-28

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

It seems like a simple question. After all, when we meet new people or even acquaintances, we often get asked that question in some sort of way. Asking who you are is the beginning of some sort of familiarity or common relationship and it is a question most frequently asked of a person:

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

...And the usual response to this question is also typical, right? We usually start with our name and where we live. Some of us describe who we are in association with someone else or something else. For instance, when at the University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire, meeting people there, I describe myself as Professor Boulter's spouse or Jim's wife, and even though I've been at St. John's for ten

years, Jim often still introduces himself to visitors and friends of St. John's as Pastor Christine's husband.

When asked who we are, most of us also assume it's about what we do: lawyer, farmer, engineer, teacher mother, father, retired, volunteer, painter. We state our activities, our hobbies, and the things we do that describe who we are. It is instinct to answer this way.

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

At the DMV, the Department of Motor Vehicles, they have another interesting way of finding out "who you are." When you get a driver's license, you must account for this in order to drive your car. Are you white, black, or Hispanic? Do you have blond hair, blue eyes, or hazel eyes? How tall are you? How much do you weigh and how old are you? Who you are is described by what you look like and how

you can be identified. Without this driver's license, it is often hard to prove you are who you actually say you are in many places.

Even On-line companies and Web pages want to find out who you are so that they can sell things to you. Social Media would like to know who you are! In fact, their business is to allow you to tell people who you are and to design what that online person is. Who you are describes what coffee you drink, what car you drive, what you wear, and how you travel.

Based upon what you buy, you are placed in categories, which define you. Furthermore, the world needs to define you this way, and we find ourselves in the same economic trap, defining ourselves by the kinds of things we consume and the political party to which we belong.

And then when you die, even your obituary describes who you *were*: when and where you were born, how long you lived, what you loved to do, what you would be remembered for, who survived you, and what you believed.

When asked this common question, "who are you," I, too, respond typically. Who am I? I am a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I'm a white female, I'm married to a Chemistry professor, Jim, and I love to sing and do photography. My father is deceased and my Mom lives in Seattle. I have a twin sister. I love nature, and I love coffee. It is the typical answer to the question, so that people may begin to know me.

**WHO ARE YOU?**

**WHO ARE YOU REALLY?**

When the Pharisees come to John the Baptist, they

have the same question, and they have agendas when asking the question, too. They want to know who John is, or rather, who he thinks he is; after all, the Pharisees have their own ideas upon who John is or even who they hope John is to be. But, John does not answer in the typical way. When asked essentially the third time: "WHO ARE YOU," John surprises us. He says,

**"I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord!"**

John doesn't say, "I'm a Jew and I follow all the law" or "I love eating wild honey and locusts while wearing camel's hair clothing." He doesn't describe his family; nor does he give his age. Lastly, he doesn't tell them what he does for a living as a baptizer. He simply says:

**"I am the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord!"**

Who John is, is not about him. He makes this very plain to the hearers of this Gospel. John's calling in life at first may seem like something he's got real talent for. Anyone who has that much ability to get people to come all that way into the desert to hear him and receive remission of sins through water, well, certainly he could make it about him. He's got the potential and the charisma. John has the resume. He's got the followers. He's got the attention of even the religious authorities.

But, John says right here in this Gospel that his ministry and even WHO he is, is not about him. Who John is, is about God. His response is to tell the Pharisees that WHO he is, is a relationship to God and that, in relationship, it is God who is the One calling him rather than John calling himself. In fact, John's entire purpose in life is to prepare the way for Immanuel, not

for his own sake, but for the sake of the One who follows him, Jesus the Christ.

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

Imagine what life would be like if we answered the question like John the Baptist. What would be different in the world? How would we startle people? How would God change us?

But, it sounds difficult to do, doesn't it? Well, it must be, for in order to answer the question with God in mind, we would have to answer people in a shocking way, by telling them about our relationship with God first, rather than defining ourselves the usual way, by the world's standards.

It would be uncomfortable and kind of weird to be like John the Baptist! Yet, let's turn it on its head here by saying what it would truly mean to have the identity the Baptist is

declaring. Instead of saying, "My name is...and I live at...and I am related to...and I have a home in...", when asked, "who are you," what would it be like to know that this truly is who you are:

**Child of God  
Marked with the Cross of  
Christ Forever  
Forgiven person  
Favored by God  
Serving Christ in word and  
deed  
Proclaiming God's Kingdom  
Making straight the way of  
the Lord...**

The point of all of this...the point I'm trying to make is...you are more than what you do. You are more than how people see you. You are more than how society defines you. Why? Because... God has formed *you*. God has called *you*. God has given *you* purpose...and that is WHO YOU ARE. Today, even now as we continue to live in a pandemic world, God does not give up on who you are. Thanks be to God. Amen.