

## WHO ARE YOU?

John 1:6-8. 19-28

“Who are you?” At Iowa State University it doesn’t matter so much what your name is, but what your ID number is. The same is true if you go to a doctor or the hospital. They want to know your insurance number. The bank wants your account number. The government is looking for your Social Security number. The airline wants your confirmation number. The catalogue company wants the invoice number.

But seriously, “Who are you?” As you scurry to wrap and hide presents, plan for a lot of company, or make sure the kids get to all their pre-Christmas parties, you really don’t have time to sit down and think about such deep questions as this. But a little over a week from now you’ll be home, the presents will be opened, the cooking will be done, and there will be time to take a breather and think, “Where do I go from here? What’s next in my life? Just who am I?”

For now we can keep too busy to ask that question, but sooner or later it confronts us. Your hair is graying and the aches and pains bother you more. It’s harder to keep down the rubber tire around your waist. You ask, “What’s becoming of me?” You’re single again and not sure how to carry on a new life. What will you do? The biopsy shows cancer. You think, “Am I going to die?” For all of us we will have to face that question, “Who are you?”

John the Baptist was asked that very question. John had been causing quite a stir among the people of Palestine. He was a man who so resembled Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Testament. So the Jewish leaders sent men to find out just who this John was. They thought he might be a prophet or even Elijah himself. The prophet Malachi had said that Elijah would appear again before the coming of God’s Messiah. But John said, “No.” No, he wasn’t Elijah, an Old Testament prophet, or even the Messiah. Finally the Jews asked him, “Who are you?”

Now what would our answer be to that question? Think about it. Who are we? Scientists tell us that we are just specks in the vast universe. Suppose that a pinhead was the sun. Then this room would be the solar system. Des Moines would be the nearest star. The Milky Way Galaxy, which we are a part of, would be 600,000 miles in diameter. And the Milky Way is just one of the smaller galaxies. So in the midst of all of that, who are we?

In our society today that becomes a tougher and tougher question. 100 years ago people did what their parents did without a lot of questioning. If your dad farmed, you farmed. If they lived in town, you did. But in our world of bytes and superconductors where do people fit in? We live in a time of increasing identity crisis. “Where do I fit in the scheme of all of this?” No wonder people turn to alcohol, internet porn, and cults. Just who are we?

John the Baptist didn’t have that confusion. He didn’t hem and haw with that question. Very clearly he said, “I am the voice of the one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the

way of the Lord.” John had no identity crisis. He knew exactly what his role was. He was to prepare the way for the Messiah. He was the forerunner for the Christ,

If only we had that kind of confidence. We’d like to be comfortable in the roles we have as professors, students, parents, office workers, husbands and wives. Yet, there are always doubts. “Could I be doing better?” “Is this the best life has to offer?” “Is this really me?” The rock group U-2 made its way into fame years ago by singing, “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” “Just who am I?”

A ship was traveling through a foggy sea when the crew saw a light in the distance. The ship signaled to the light to move out of the way. The light signaled back, ordering the ship to move instead. Angered, the ship’s captain replied, “Move over; this is the captain of the ship.” The light replied, “This is the lighthouse; move over or your ship will run aground.”

So often we don’t know who we are because of that kind of stubbornness. We want to make our own identities, ignoring the one we have been given. Have you ever heard of Gavrilo Princip? He’s the man who shot Archduke Ferdinand to start the events leading to World War I. He wanted to make a name for himself, but unless you look it up on Google, we don’t know who he was. Thomas Paine wrote Common Sense, which helped lead to the American Revolution. He said his book would surpass the Bible in popularity. But who of us has ever read Common Sense? If we want to make our identity, here it is—“From dust we came and to dust we shall go.” We came from nothing, so we will go to nothing. As much as we try to answer the question, “Who are we?” we won’t find the answer.

Yet, John knew who he was. He didn’t make his identity; he received it. In John 3 we read John’s words:

No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear witness that I have said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease.

John didn’t stubbornly insist on making his own identity. He simply obeyed what was God’s will for him. He found his identity, not in himself, but in the one he was preparing for—Jesus. Thus he could sincerely make this marvelous statement of faith, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” John was with it; he really knew who he was.

We have the same identity, not one we’ve made, but one given to us. In Baptism we were given an identity—“Receive the sign of the holy cross to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.” Our identity is Christ. “You were buried with Christ by baptism into His death, so that as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4,5) “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” (1 Peter 2:9) Who are we? We are Christ’s—Christians!

God has given us that identity so we can trust Him as John did. We don't have to be threatened anymore by the question, "Who are you?" John was not threatened to know that when Christ would come he would have to fade away from the picture. He knew his whole purpose was to point people to the Messiah, not himself. He knew that as he was made less, God would be greater. Then his real identity as God's servant would be all the stronger. Our old Adam will continually want to elevate us—to tempt us to make our own identity by high salaries, big promotions, and academic awards. But in Baptism our old Adam, our old self is drowned, held under water to die, so that our real identity as God's people can grow. Then we know that even when we are weak, when we are overlooked or ignored, when life is tough, and when death comes, God, and our relationship with Him, is strong.

"Who am I?" We still have to face this question as we make decisions about our careers, our marriages, our family, our dealings with friends, and getting older. And there is in us a desire to explore, to discover the marvels of our universe. But in that search we know our ultimate identity—we know who we are as Christians.

On Christmas God came to give us our identity. As you wrap the presents and stuff the stockings, as you look at a Christmas tree, as you see all four candles lit on the Advent wreath, as you hold a candle on Christmas Eve and sing, "Silent Night," as you hear once again the words, "And it came to pass that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus . . .," remember you are not just a spectator. You are not merely entering your ID number into a computer. You are right there with the shepherds and angels. Baby Jesus came to give you your real identity. So with John the Baptist when we are asked, "Who are you?" we can have the same confidence to say, "I do not matter. What matters is my Savior, my Lord, Christ Jesus. I am His!"