

Who am I? Why am I here?

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Robert Woody (12/17/17)

Sermon-in-a-sentence: Like John the Baptist, we find our identity by responding to our common call to be the Way of Jesus, the hands and feet and eyes of Jesus, here and now and forever.

Who are you? What do you have to say about yourself? Why are you here? Not just here at church, or this church, but here in the world?

These are the kind of questions the religious leaders were asking John the Baptist in today's Gospel reading. Hundreds, probably thousands of people were going out into the wilderness to hear John the Baptist's message. Many were having life changing experiences.

He was basically asking them and challenging them with the same questions. Who are you, really? What is your life purpose? Want a fresh start? Let me baptize you.

And he was saying, soon, very soon, someone is coming who is going to change **everything**. He's going to change "who you are," and "why you are here."

But why am I asking **you**, and **myself**, the same challenging questions, the Jewish leaders were asking John the Baptist? Especially on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, only one week till Christmas! This is **way too busy** a time of year to ponder such deep and profound questions. Way too much going on with all the Advent prepping, and Christmas prepping, families coming, meals to prepare, presents to buy, lights to hang outside and inside.

Clearly the wrong time and season, to **ask** or **ponder** these questions!

But why are we anticipating and celebrating the birth of Jesus? Is it all about celebrating the beauty and mystery and wonder of his birth in a manger surrounded by shepherds, visited by wise men? And why are we also celebrating, in this season of Advent, the promise and mystery of the 2nd Coming? Is it all about celebrating our ticket to heaven?

Could it possibly be that all of this Advent, Christmas, 1st and 2nd Comings hoopla, are actually about these **simple**, yet **profound** questions? Who am I? Why am I here? Am I living out my true life purpose? Or am I completely distracted?

Jesus came, and Jesus comes to challenge us, to wake us up, to make us ponder who we really are, and why we are even here. I think . . . the reason we here, the reason we exist, is to love God, **and** to love one another, to love our family, friends and neighbors, to love God's creation. And we can't really love God if we are not loving God's world, God's creation, and loving God's children -- all of God's children, from every race, nation, religion, including the ones who are broken, lost, disoriented.

That's why Jesus came: to explain and model and pour himself out to show us what it **really** looks like to love God and love our neighbors -- and to show us the many ways we are **blind**, where we need to **wake up** so that we can follow his Way, so we can be a part of God's Kingdom, here and now, and for eternity.

Christmas is a wonderful time to connect with and love our family and friends. But that's not the whole purpose of Christmas and the Season of Advent, this season of preparation. I think the deeper purpose of Advent is to open ourselves up to these most challenging questions.

We are challenged to follow the example of John the Baptist, who was very clear about who he was and why he was here; and very willing to sacrifice and suffer to be real.

So, given Jesus' birth and life and teachings and promises, "Who am I, really?" "Who are **you**?" "Why am I here?" "Why are you here?"

As I was pondering and preparing my sermon this week, I came across this card on my desk. It's a poem written by Teresa of Avila. Rev. Judy shared it with us a few months ago. And when I read it, I realized, this is the real answer to these questions. This is **who** I am meant to be. This is **why** I'm here.

**"Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.**

**Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion
is to look out to the world.**

**Yours are the feet with which Christ
is to go about doing good.**

**Yours are the hands with which Christ
is to bless all people now."**

Teresa of Avila is saying that we are not just about celebrating or believing in the birth of Jesus, or celebrating or believing in the Way of Jesus. We **are** the Way of Jesus! We are to live out Jesus' life and purpose here and now, in our world. That's who we are, and why we are here.

Being the Way of Jesus is **not** easy. How did it work for John the Baptist, when he came to introduce Jesus and the Way of Jesus? He was beheaded. But he did help start a movement that ended up following Jesus.

How did it work for Jesus? He was crucified. But he did pour out his life to Love and to show us the Way of Love.

This journey, following and living the Way of this child born in a stable, the Way of Jesus, will never be easy. But I think that's who I am and why I'm here. And I think that's who you are and why you are here. To be the hands and feet and heart of the child who began his Earthly adventure in Bethlehem.

Amen.