

August 24, 2008  
Matthew 16:13-20  
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### Who mI, rU, rWe?

I have not come to ask the question of answer "What's in your wallet?" but to share what's in my bag. Pat and I do not travel much during the summer, but we did a first for us during the last part of June. We went to the camp at Temple Hills for grandparents and grandchildren, the same one that Bill and Marie Libby and their granddaughter Danielle attended. Their story was in the August newsletter.

After review of our forms, the first item of business was to make name tags. I had to remind the boys that they needed to wear their name tags all the time (except in the pool and sleeping). People prefer to be known by their name rather than being called "Hey you" or "Boy". At my high school, a group of us went by our last names because there were several with the same first name. The senior English teacher asked a question one day and someone said "Let Holmer answer, he should know." She responded, "His name is Lawrence." But a name tag, which we all have the opportunity to wear here at church, is only a small part of the answer to the question "Who am I?"

A nice part of the program, at least for the grandparents, is the time out rest period from 1-2 p.m. Not sure what was going on in the minds of the other three in the room, but sometimes I thought about what to say today in light of my experience and the Gospel lesson for today, which is Matthew 16:13-20.

The philosopher Alan Watts said, "Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth."

It is a difficult task and a struggle over a long period of time for some people. Some do it by writing the story of their lives, a task I wanted to do when I retired but haven't gotten around to. The presumptive presidential candidates have both written such stories; Barack Obama's "Dreams of My Father", a story of discovery of self and his heritage; and John McCain's "Faith of My Fathers" about causes greater than one's self.

There are many chapters in my story. I have a German background and culture on both sides of my family. Am I a "German Urbanite Buckeye"? Reflecting on past decades, I would have to admit that I am a ruralite now in an urban setting. For 30 years I lived in the town of New Bremen (home of the Cardinals) before moving to be near our grandson. No, we are not Hudson Explorers, but Stow Bulldogs and we even have an original English bulldog named "Brutus Buckeye"

by the grandsons. The struggle is, which mascot do I support. Am I a President (Thomas Jefferson Jr. High, Lincoln High), a Blue Jay, a Yeoman, a Commodore, or a Penguin or Pioneer? The only school without a mascot is Eden, so I must be a Paradise(r). I don't think so, though. I don't roll many sevens.

The churches served shaped and taught me many things even if I was not aware of it at the time. Could say I was a pastor of saints, but that would be stretching it a bit. Paul said that we are sinners and Martin Luther said we are forgiven sinners.

Maybe I'm an elitist. I spent more years in school after graduation from high school than before graduation. But I don't fit that category if I look at income figures. I started at \$.35 an hour in high school; \$1.73 per hour as an assistant pastor and \$6.00 at retirement. You don't become a minister to make money, but to assist others in becoming disciples, pilgrims on a life-long journey of following Jesus the Christ. A pastor of one of our nearby churches told me "You Germans pinch the penny, my Swiss Germans pull on Lincoln's bow tie."

In the creed the Latin word "personae" does not mean "person", but a role, a relationship. I am a "trinity" – three roles in one being. Son, spouse, father, and after 70 years I am a "quadripartite" (a grandpa).

Enough about me. Who are you? Who are we?

You know how it is when you or your child or grandchild receives an item with the words "Some Assembly Required". The paper comes off, the pieces are on the table or floor and away we go. At camp one of the craft items was the Eye of God, made from 2 sticks and multicolored yarn. I had made several before but was having trouble until a girl showed Matthew and I how to do it. Too often we forget to read the instructions or wait to listen to others. So let's go to the book of instructions – the Scriptures.

Jesus and his disciples are gathered near Caesarea Philippi with its 14 temples of the ancient Syrian Baal worship, a cavern said to be the birth place of the great god of nature, Pan. It is also said to be the source of the Jordan River with its many memories for the Jewish community and there is a great temple built to the godhead of Caesar. Tetrarch Philip, son of Herod, added to the temple and put his name on the City. William Barclay, in the Daily Bible Study series, says "It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religious in all their history and their splendor, and demanded to be compared to them."

Did Jesus have a struggle to know who he was? The Babe of Bethlehem, one from Nazareth, the carpenter's son, son of Mary. I don't think so. At the age of 12 he

told his parents, "Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:49) Jesus knew who he was as we find them in Scriptures. The baptism story (Matthew 3:17) "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Then you have the many "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John: "I am the bread of life; the light of the world; the door; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life; the true vine; the Father and I are one; I am God's son. Jesus knew who he was.

The struggle was how to go about His mission and message as we notice in the temptation stories. In today's lesson, Jesus wanted to know if anyone grasped who and what He is. Would the mission and message continue to grow and spread?

The opening verses of the lesson reminded me of the words of the poet Robert Burns, "O wad some pow'r the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us!"

Jesus asked the disciples "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The disciples responded in many ways. John the Baptist, come back from the dead; Elijah, one of the great prophets and forerunner of the Messiah; Jeremiah, another forerunner, or one of the prophets. And of course we can't overlook Pilate and the inscription on the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

Jesus was not a person of wealth, wrote no music, left his teachings to the memory of his friends, led no army. The historians of the time thought that Jesus was unworthy of mention.

Then Jesus wanted to know how those who were on the journey or pilgrimage with him those few years. It is a long way from admiration to commitment. Did they really know "What I am". Peter said "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Messiah in Greek is "Christos", "Anointed One". Because this was divinely inspired, Jesus tells Simon, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

There are two different Greek or Latin words in the text. Petros, Peter: a piece of rock or stone. Petra/Petram: a mass of rock. What is meant by the word Petra/Rock? There have been many answers give. Some say Peter, himself. Some say Peter's faith, some Jesus himself, and some the truth of the confession given that Jesus the Christ is the Son of the Living God.

Verses from the Epistles tell us that the prophets and apostles are the foundation and Jesus the Christ himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and Jesus is the only foundation (I Cor. 3:11).

I Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 tells who you are: "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and live living stones you yourselves are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus the Christ." "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

In chapter 9 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus calls his followers, disciples and apostles. A disciple is a learner, a pupil, someone who believes in and follows the teaching of a leader. We remain open to learning from the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ. An apostle is a delegate, ambassador, messenger, one sent out on a specific mission on behalf of another, part of a faith fellowship, learners in the faith, who in special times need to be ambassadors. Success of the mission of God depends on those to whom it has been entrusted.

Many are the verses that answer the question "Who is Jesus?" He is the "salt of the earth", "light of the world", "...branches of the true vine", "...if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples", "everyone will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another", you are my friends if you do what I command you", "I have chosen you out of the world", "you are witnesses of these things".

There are not too many verses that state who we are – "So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say "We are worthless slaves"; we have done only what we ought to have done." "We have to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." The hardest one to give our voice to is found in Matthew 20:22. "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able."

After this experience at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus turns and heads south and begins the journey to Jerusalem. We who are the living stones are also on a journey or pilgrimage.

At camp we took some nature walks on the trails through the woods. We were told to bring only closed shoes and we found out why. There were all kinds of stones on the trails, some rough with sharp edges, others showing many layers, others were smooth. What kind of living stones are we? Some of us are seekers, beginners, others have many layers, years of learning, others are smoothed by the trials and testing of our faith on our journey.

It has been calculated by some that the disciples walked 3,125 miles with Jesus over the course of his ministry, the hardest being when Jesus was crucified. They were devastated, defeated, and afraid. But their hopes were kindled and their direction was clarified. Their dream was still alive because their Lord was still alive! Jesus had risen from the dead, and appeared to them. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and gave them strength, courage and power to be apostles of the Christ.

We can ask ourselves, "What are we to do as Christians?" Some will say to reject the world and wait for the second coming. Others will say to resemble the world, blend in. Saint Paul, in Romans 12:2 tells us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Be its conscience, light of the world, salt of the earth, the leaven of the loaf. By so doing by word and deed we will strive to redeem the world. We are called to make a difference.

Jesus sends us as his apostles to take to the world His caring, compassionate, loving, healing, helping, redemptive touch. We are to be living stones as faithful advocates serving together (IHN, ASP, Habitat volunteers). I know of a congregation with a program called SERVE: Support of families and youth, Encourage spiritual development, Reach out with service, Voice the hope of the good news of Jesus, Envision a better world through Christ's example.

I am a member of the family of God, you are necessary and needed for our fellowship to become a church, we are called to carry on the mission and message to serve in the name of Christ.

The journey has many stumbling stones that can trip us, and even cause us to slip, lose our balance, and fall. But we are not alone for Christ is with us. You know the saying "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket." I say let us not keep Church in a bag, let us put it on the stand so the message and the mission will shine forth in Hudson, Ohio, USA, the world. We are here to help guide, walk through our troubles, lift each other up and continue the journey, so that we too may echo the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem *Who Am I?* – "Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine."