

Sermon Notes: Finding your identity and owning it
Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matthew 16:13-20, at SALC on 8/23/26

Introduction

Last week, you would have heard that although Jesus raised issues of justice and social reform, he did not lead a social justice movement as it would detract from his primary purpose as Messiah and savior proclaiming that anyone who believed in Him will not perish but have abundant and eternal life. That's our gospel to proclaim as Christ's witnesses AND we too, like Him will not stand by in the face of injustice in the world. We will be the salt and light of the world. Now Jesus, while having multiple passions and roles, stayed focussed because he knew who He was - his identity - and He owned it. So brothers and sisters, we are also to know our identity and own it. My topic: Finding your identity and owning it. Who are you and do you show that you know it?

A search for identity:

1. Ancestry.com - people want to know their genealogy. They want to know their cultural and racial identity. Surprises: culture (British... Irish or German!) For many caucasians, there is the surprise that some of their ancestry may be in Africa or Asia. In America, it is amazing how many people, Black, White and everything in between, find some native American genes in them.

2. If you go to ancestry.com for Jesus, what would you find? Matthew records it - I mean His ancestry, his genealogy. Interesting that Matthew, someone writing primarily for the Jews, did not - or could not - hide that Jesus did not come from "pure" human Jewish heritage. He mentions Rehab a Canaanite and Ruth a Moabite as part of that heritage. Worse still, Rehab was a prostitute and Ruth's mother sent her to seduce Boaz. Boaz was a son of Rehab. Ruth and Boaz are great grandparents of David, and his great great grandmother was Rehab, and the rest is history. So much for pure race - there is no so-called pure race. Yet we want to know who we are.
3. Besides ancestry, we also would like to define who we are. But there is much that makes us what we are. We are products of our times, our community, our relationships, etc.
4. I am a man - you may not be. I am a husband - you may not be. I am a father. I am heterosexual - you may not be. I am a pastor....
5. Where I grew up makes me who I am. What I studied - my educational focus makes me who I am. I'm not talking about the level of education. BTW, we all are educated, whether through an educational institution or a PhD or Masters from the University of Life and Culture.
6. Who my friends are influences who I am. Whom I choose to spend my time with influences who I am.
7. In the nguni languages like isiZulu, a South African language, we have a term, "uBuntu" = "I am because you are", or "a person is a person through other people." This was there from early civilization, long before 1624 when

John Donne wrote in Meditation 17 "No man is an island, Entire of itself; Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main."

Finding your identity

Let's turn back to Scripture.

1. How did Peter find his identity? Through Jesus. What we know of Peter was that he was a fairly rough and ready, redneck kinda guy - in the best possible way. A strong personality, as I mentioned a few weeks ago. Simon was son of Jonah. Not the Old Testament Jonah, and that guy struggled with his identity and calling, until God stepped in - more like splashed in. But we'll leave that there and look at Peter.

2. You are called Simon son of Jonah, now just Peter! Forget about your ancestry. Your purpose will determine your identity, Peter. Petros, meaning "rock". The rock, the foundation, the rock face, the fortress. A new and clear identity defined by his purpose. Jesus defined Peter's identity. How about you? Who or what defines us?

Did Peter still have other identities? Yes: husband, friend, fisherman... but primary, the Rock, the Apostle. The First Apostle, as some refer to him as.

How did he get to the point of finding his identity?

1. When Jesus asked him, "Who do you say that I am?"
2. Dialogue: ... John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah,...
3. Who do you say I am, Simon? You are The Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus immediately says, that confession of

his identity didn't come to Peter from himself, but from God! But one has to wonder, who was being identified here? Jesus or in fact, Peter?

4. So for us, when we identify Christ - by the Spirit - then we find our identity. When we do find our identity in and by Christ, our other identities become minor, and many of them are almost inconsequential. All earthly identities will pass. Our jobs will end, our role as spouses, parent, child, student, will end. We may move and take new citizenship, etc. Our property ownership, our bank balances will change. Our identities on earth will change, but our identity in Christ will never change. That is an eternal truth - you can take that to the bank - pun intended!

Owning your identity: Do we own our identity?

1. Peter owned his identity until death. If you do not own your identity, the enemy will trick you into denying it. Peter did - even after he was named the Rock, but thank God, He will not let us lose our identity. He restored Peter. Jesus will not let us lose it.
2. Peter owned it. He stepped up to the plate, even when he felt inadequate. He did not deny Jesus again. When you read the first half of Acts, after the Gospels, you will see that. That half is sometimes called the Acts of Peter when the second is called the Acts of Paul - his identity as a whole nother story. These great acts that shaped the church and the world was because they owned their Christ-given identity. Let's step up to ours and the Lord will lead. Amen