

Sermon Notes Sunday 13 January Baptism of Christ, Coffs Harbour

There was once a wild goose who went to live with some tame geese. He was committed to liberate them from their mediocre lives. The wild goose lived with the tame geese for a year, and he enjoyed the rich food, comfortable shelter and easy life. Each year, when the wild geese flew overhead, he would flutter his wings, prepare to join them but settle down again in the farmyard. Ten years passed and the wild goose became tame, and if forgot how to fly. Soren Kierkegaard

We are reminded by this worship service today, as we celebrate the Baptism of Christ, by the words; prayers; & songs, of **our true identity**. Our true identity is as *disciples*.

This theme of identity is dealt with in various ways in today's readings. In today's Gospel, Jesus' identity as the Son of the Father is affirmed by the voice of God: "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased"

His identity is also confirmed by a key witness, John the Baptist, who points out to those gathered that it is Jesus, not him, who is the expected Messiah.

In the Acts of the Apostles, our second reading, the people of Samaria are known to have accepted faith in God;

This inner acceptance or belief is confirmed by an outward act or sign of their faith: Peter and John lay hands on them. An outward identity accompanies or signifies this inner belief.

In the OT reading for today, we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah. Our identity is that we have been created and known by God from the beginning:

But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

..... I have called you by name, you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

..... you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,

...bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—

⁷everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

God invites, through Isaiah, all those whom he has created to come to him: to live in his way

In him we discover our true identity, the purpose for which we were formed and created: to acknowledge God and worship him and live in his way

Each of us has an identity:

I'm a father, a husband, a son, a priest and bishop: we each have several identities

Maybe you're a husband or wife, a father or grandmother

Also maybe a teacher or plumber

A member of a netball team, soccer team or of the local golf club; a Blues supporter or a Reds supporter?

We each have several identities: many coexist quite well but some might appear to compete: I'm Australian, but I'm also British

Many people in our country today are Australian but also Sudanese, or Somali, or Vietnamese

In our global world it's not only possible but likely that these dual identities coexist not only in communities but in individuals

This richness and diversity is to be celebrated, and this complexity of cultures revitalises belonging, which is so much of who we are and what we are. But in this richness, how do I know who I am and where I belong?

Irish author and priest John O'Donohue writes that each one of us is responsible for deciphering who we actually are, in the face of competing and multiple identities: "Who are you, he asks, behind your mask, your role?"; Who are you when you are alone, by yourself? In the middle of the night when you lie awake, who are you then?

About 4 years ago, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby found out that the person he thought was his father was not, after all, his biological father. A journalist discovered this and revealed it to the press. His response was that he found his identity not in DNA but in Jesus Christ.

In the light of our OT reading today from Isaiah (quoted earlier) our identity is held in the narrative of being known perfectly and loved unconditionally: "I have called you by name, you are mine"

In this security of the unconditional love of the one who created us, we can develop and discover identity, neither constrained nor lost in the desert of infinite choice.

On multiple occasions in the NT, the disciples are reminded that **their** true identity **will be known**, and this will have *implications* for their lives: this identity will be counter to the culture of the world around them hence it will mark them out and may even attract the hatred of others.

For those who have an identity as disciples of Jesus today, all this is no less true today!

Currently this parish is looking for a new Rector. That means you have a Parish Profile that says something about who you are, who you are called to be, what things you do, and also what your vision is for future mission and ministry here. But unless you each live out this identity as disciples, then this Profile isn't worth the paper it's written on.

By living out this identity as disciples, we show that we are not tame geese after all, but that we take the wings of the Holy Spirit and respond to a higher call beyond ourselves – the call of the unconditional love of our creator, to another way.

On this Sunday of the Baptism of Christ, we are reminded that we are continuously being called into this new way of life – this new identity as followers of Jesus.

May God richly bless you in this way as you turn from the tame geese and join the wild ones.

+Murray Harvey