

Identity

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:19-25, Galatians 3:26-29

This morning, am continuing with our sermon series on Living in Love and Faith, and my topic is on Identity

Identity in its simplicity is 'who we are.' The question of who we are is perhaps the central question of life that at some point, we have all asked ourselves. For some, perhaps you have the answer, which I think is great. For others, you are probably still searching and hopefully not given up. The reality is that it's a question that must be answered.

And this morning in light of the living in love and faith course and our sermon series, i want to try and attempt to help us think about identity, and I want to use the mirrors as an illustration. The idea of the mirror is derived from James 1.23-24, where we are reminded that the word of God is like a mirror, "*we look into it and we see exactly who we are or what we are really like.*"

To know who we are, Our identity, is a little bit like looking in the mirror. And I believe we have three mirrors when we are talking about identity, the first mirror is 'How do I see myself?' The second is 'How do others see me?' and the third mirror is How does God see and think about me?'

When I look in the first two mirrors, which is how do I see myself and how do others see me, I see what I call Identity markers, things that make up who I am. These might include, things to do with my race, ethnicity, culture and nationality, my gender and sexuality, my relations, my age, my occupation, possessions and so on. My unique identity is formed when I integrate all these things into my personality and character.

These identity markers can be influenced both positively and negatives by a number of things, like, entertainment, media, my relationships, places and times, communities and cultures, and that includes the Church.

There was a time in my life when the question 'Where are you from?' was a really easy to answer, but today because of changes to my identity markers, *I have to think twice before answering that question. I probably have to look in the second mirror (how am seen by others) to answer this question, normally I find what the person is simply asking is where I belong!* And you will be rather surprised how often am asked that question.

Looking into these two mirrors, there will be identity markers about me that am happy to reveal about myself, like am a father, a son, a husband, a black man, a priest and so on and yet, there will be things about me that I will be very hesitant to reveal or share mainly for fear of either being judged or rejected by others.

It's C.S Lewis who once said, that "what you see, and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing."

But these two mirrors do not tell the whole story on identity. As Christians, the starting point of who we are, our identity, is by looking into the third mirror. The third mirror should be the first mirror we look into when seeking to know issues of identity.

The biblical teaching on who God says we are begins in our Genesis readings with the idea of being created in the image of God. You and me, are sons and daughters of our Father, the creator God of all that is seen and unseen. God who made us and knows us best, has given us a definitive, unique and perfect reflection of our identity.

I believe when we grasp this, when we live like this, then we will be truly authentically ourselves, people who uniquely God has made us to be. This in turn will take away any fear, and will give us a sense of security in who we are as sons and daughters of the living God.

I was very fortunate to learn this from a very young age from my mother, who reminded me almost constantly that am above all a child of God, made in His image. And the reason she did this is that she knew I might, and definitely was, struggling with the whole issue of identity, given that I literally had three personalities.

You see, my mum was from a different tribe, my dad from a different tribe, born and raised in a foreign tribe. Which in turn meant, I spoke three languages (now five), had a name/s for each tribe and was exposed to different cultures and customs. All this was not helped by the fact that my looks were for those of the neighbouring country to Uganda, which I later found out that my grandparents had immigrated from.

For a young person, this could have led to a major identity crisis if it was not for the wisdom of my mum....But knowing ultimately which mirror to look into for my genuine identity really helped me come to terms with other identity markers mentioned above.

And so my encouragement from my own experience on this is that, Above all, God's opinion is the one that counts. Accept what God says about you, agree with Him that it is true of you, and become the spiritual person you are.

When our identity is found in the first mirror, firmly rooted in Christ, I believe this brings out another aspect of being created in the image of God, and that is the fact that we accept all humanity has an inherent worth and equality.

Paul in Galatians 3.26 reminds us that "you are all Sons and daughters of God through Faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul is effectively reminding us that no matter what race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or whatever distinguishes you from others, our identity in Christ, as God's image bearers is what should inform who we are. And not only that, it should inform our world view, by having a direct influence on our relationships within our society and community. So that when people look into the second mirror of how they are seen by others, they will be affirmed and not judged or rejected and led to isolation.

I believe every single human has inherent value, worth and meaning, neither because of who we are in relation to others, nor who we have created ourselves to be perhaps through our own achievements...but rather we all have value and worth and meaning because God has given us infinite value and worth as our heavenly father.

When we look into God's mirror, we see that

- God made us in His own image, beautiful and wonderfully made. Gen 1.31, *"God saw all that He had made and it was very good."*
- Sin marred us; Romans 3.23, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*
- Grace transforms us

As such, we relate to other humans as equal image bearers and partners, irrespective of things that distinguish us, other identity markers. Every person bears the image of God, there is no second-class citizen in God's human creation.

One final thing I would like to say, which builds on a little bit about what Jonathan said last week, which is something am having to do as well, is that if we are to seek to live together well, we must make every effort to try and understand other people's identities. We have to listen to them and their stories.

Put aside any fears and judgement and listen. And that's what this course is about. Listening is something we as Christians, the Church has not done well in the past and now we have this opportunity to engage as a Church together.

When we do listen, and I mean really listen, we might begin to have a little insight into people's lives, which will help us understand what shape's human identity. Engaging with this sermon series and joining the course is a great way to start. And I think when we do, we will discover how we all reflect God differently and uniquely.