

St. Andrew's Church – May 9, 2010
Sermon "Who am I?" – The Rev. Doug Kendall

Lord God, may the words of my mouth,
and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts
be acceptable to you, our God and our guide. AMEN.

Who are you, who am I.
What is your identity,
how do you know yourself, and how do others know you?
This is not an easy question to answer.
You see, different people know us in different ways.
You know me as a minister.
My family when I was a kid knew me as the youngest in a family of four.
The baby of the family with everything that goes along with that.

Pam knows me as a husband, loving and caring and always punctual...
Always neat and tidy, great cook, great housekeeper, general contractor
never procrastinating,
good athlete, marathon runner... humble... and the list goes on.
Daniel and Sam know me as dad.
Different people know me in different contexts,
and they know different parts of who I am, but no one knows the whole me,
well almost no one.

Today is mother's day.
Which got me to thinking,
how do we know our mothers?
As mothers, how are you known by others?
It is easy to have your whole identity become wrapped up in being a mother.
It is easy as children to see our mother's whole identities as being wrapped up
in how your mother relates to you.
But is that everything?
I remember being surprised to discover that my mother
Was a university drop out, and it was my dad's fault.
She dropped out of university to marry my dad
When she was only a year away from getting her degree in geography
From McGill university in Montreal.
The thing I had the hardest time picturing,
was my mom at university studying geography.
I always knew that my mother was bright, and a good musician,
but I could not picture her as a geography student at university.
That was not a part of her identity, for me, and yet it was a part of who she was.

Who are you?
How do people know you?
How do different people in different contexts, different situations know you?

And the other big question, How do you see yourself?
Is your identity wrapped up in your work?
Is your identity wrapped up in being a mother? a father? a child?
If your identity is closely tied to one aspect of who you are,
what would happen if that that part of your identity were no longer there?

I am going to ask you to do something a little different now.
Turn to a few people around you, and tell them something about yourself,
that they probably don't know.
It could be a hobby, or an interest, or something you used to do,
It could be a hidden dream you have.
Think of something about you that the other person doesn't know,

And share it with them.
Take a moment....

All of this brings us back, believe it or not, to our scripture readings today.
In the Exodus passage we heard,
Moses is speaking to God through the burning bush.
Actually this is a beautiful passage,
Because Moses is negotiating with God.
God wants Moses to go and get his people out of Egypt,
but Moses is not convinced he can do it.
The issue is how will he convince the Israelites to follow him,
how will he convince the Egyptians that he has any authority?
Moses says to God,
tell me your name,
give me your name so that I can take it with me
when I see the Israelites and the Egyptians.

After some convincing God gives Moses a name,
and the name is I AM.
I am who I am, I have been who I have been, I am who I will be.
In a sense it is not a name.
Moses wanted a name in order to know who God is,
to be able to define God in some way,
and God's response is twofold.
Don't try to define me, because I am who I am,
and I will be whoever I choose to be.
And yet at the same time the "I AM" was a name.
The Hebrew of I AM is four letters,
which in English are YHWH, the holy name,
which we pronounce Yahweh.

That became the holy name of God for the people of Israel.
That name did not end in the Old Testament though.
When Jesus was trying to explain to people who he was,
He had a heck of a time.
You see, everyone had expectations of what the Messiah would be like,
And in many ways Jesus did not match
not only their preconceived idea of who the Messiah ought to be,
but also who they hoped he would be.
The Messiah had to be strong and powerful and conquer the Romans.
The Messiah had to be a great priest and reform the corrupt temple worship.

And even today we are in many ways in the same position.
Some people like to see "Jesus friend so kind and gentle",
The one who cares for us and forgives us.
Others like to see Jesus as the rule maker
who tells us exactly what we should and should not do
and how to get into heaven.
Still others prefer to see Jesus as the great advocate of social justice,
If you want to serve him, it means serving the least of his children,
Making sure all of God's children have clean water and education,
And can live without fear and violence.

There seem to be almost as many understandings of who Jesus ought to be,
And who Jesus was, as there are people who read the bible,
And many who don't even read the bible.

Jesus was forever telling people who he was and who he is,
and in many of these cases he very subtly used the holy name of God
that we just heard in the Old Testament reading.

Have you ever noticed, especially in the Gospel of John,
how often Jesus says I am.
I am the bread,
I am the light,
I am the door
I am the shepherd,
I am the resurrection and the life,
I am the way, the truth, and the life
I am the vine,
There are many different images Jesus uses,
and they are repeated over and over again in the gospel of John.
Each of these sayings begins with the words I AM.
Does this sound familiar from somewhere?
We get our "I am" from the exodus passage in the Old Testament.
Whenever Jesus said, I am the bread, or I AM the light,
his Jewish audiences would subtly hear the reference to God,
and the association Jesus was making between himself and God.

Jesus identity was intricately wrapped up with God,
he and God were inseparable, indistinguishable.
That was Jesus identity.
How about us?
How are we, who are you, who am I?

We have shared a bit about who we are,
but there is one other subtlety that I had not noticed until recently.
When I say, I am a minister, I am a gardener, I am an amateur musician,
I am a Kendall, or even I am a Christian,
there is one extra word stuck in there.
That word takes away my uniqueness, and makes me one of many,
and in a sense makes it impossible to define me.
It is that little word "a" or "an".
It is an indefinite article according to my Webster's dictionary.
That "a" makes me one of many ministers, gardeners, Christians.
Do you know how to get rid of that pesky indefinite article?
I can't say I am minister, I am woodworker, I am father,
but I can say I am Doug,
or if my Mom could be here here, I would have to say I am Douglas.

That is what makes me unique.
Oh sure there are other Doug's, but none of them is like me.
Who I am, is Doug,
that is the whole package.
All my interest and hobbies and role wrapped up into who I am.
My identity is not entirely wrapped up in my occupation or calling,
in my hobbies, my interests.
My identity is much more than those things,
all of our identities are more than the sum of our roles.

I mentioned earlier that no one knows me completely, not even Pam.
Then I said, almost no one.
There is someone who knows us fully,
and that is God.

God knows all about us, our likes and dislikes,
our hobbies and interests,
our job, our calling,
what we are good at,
and what we fake our way through.
Our flaws we hide from people and also our strengths.

And the amazing thing is that even though God knows all those things,
Even though God knows our total package,
God still loves us.

It is easy for us to get wrapped up in our roles.
It is easy for us to see others only in the limitations of the roles they have,
whether it be in the role they play in their job, their hobbies,
or the role they have in the family.
May we never forget that we are more than the sum total of our roles,
and that others we meet are more than the different roles they have.
May we also never forget that God knows all of our roles and all of our identities,
and still loves us for who we are,
his precious children.
In Jesus name, AMEN.