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## *Remember Who You Are and Whose You Are!*

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh**  
**Proper 16 – Year A**

Jesus said, “Who do people say that I am?”

I speak these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

There is an old saying among preachers that we really only have three sermons we give over and over again. It doesn't matter the scripture, or the season, we preach the same themes over and over again. I don't need to tell you all this. You could come up and tell each of us clergy the sermons we preach over and over again.

When I hear today's gospel, I am reminded of a priest that is near and dear to my own life, Annwn Myers. The Reverend Annwn Myers was the associate chaplain when I was in college and later became my first boss when I left college. She preached at my ordination, again at my wedding, and she is now at the School of Theology at Sewanee.

I think about her this morning because she preached one sermon over and over again—“Remember Who You Are and Remember Whose You Are.”

Now, you can imagine that went over well on a college campus. After a Friday night party, a Saturday of festivities, and another Saturday night party, come Sunday morning you needed to hear the words, “remember who you are and whose you are.”

If parents were dropping their children off at school (like many of you have just done), or you were up visiting your child at college, you loved hearing the preacher in the pulpit say the words, “remember who you are and remember whose you are.” They would throw their hands in the air and say, “Amen! Praise Jesus! This is the best place.” They had been saying those words to their children for years.

The reason that sermon stuck is because the college years are figuring out your identity. But, it doesn't stop there. We spend the rest of our lives trying to figure out who we are. It's about identity.

We enter into relationships. We start dating and then get engaged. We try figuring out who we are as individuals and as a couple. We get married and then have children, and have to figure it all out over again.

Unfortunately, relationships come to an end. Whether it's through divorce, or death doing them apart, as canon pastor, I spend a lot of time with people trying to figure out who they are later in life.

Work is about identity. You try to figure out who you are and grow in your career. Maybe you have changed jobs, or lost your job, and are now forced to “recreate” yourself. It is about identity. Maybe you've been in the same career all your life, forcing you to distinguish yourself from others. Or, maybe you have to realize your place in the market or brand yourself against the competitors. It is about identity.

Conflict is about identity. Yes, for all you conflict-avoidance people, conflict is really about identity. Whether it's conflict in relationships, or conflict at work, or even conflict here in the church, it's about trying to figure out who you are and whose

you are, and who you are called to serve. It's about identity.

Now, if we look at the readings today we see the importance of identity. In Exodus, we hear about this Hebrew boy (Moses) that is taken up into Pharaoh's house. The rest of Exodus is about his identity. In today's gospel, Jesus enters Caesarea Philippi says, "Who do people say that I am?" Why is that location important? Caesarea Philippi is a town named after Caesar might. It might have well been called Caesarville, says one of the commentaries. It was a politically charged place, where Caesar is Lord, where Caesar is seen as the Messiah, and it is there that Jesus asks a question about identity.

It's Peter who says, "You are the Messiah," and Jesus turns to Peter and says, "You are the rock." Again, it's about identity!

So, how do we figure out who we are? How do we answer that question in our own lives? How do we teach our children how to answer that question in their lives? Do we take a fancy online assessments? I've certainly done that. Do we introduce them to the Enneagram? Do we tell them to get a spiritual director, life coach, mentor, or counselor? How do we teach them to answer that question, and how do we answer it for ourselves?

I think we answer it when two things take place: 1. When we are in relationship with God. 2. When we are in relationship with others. Now, I am stealing one of Dean Candler's sermons. It is about relationships!

Look at the passages from Exodus. Moses is in relationship with the Hebrew people and with Pharaoh, but what happens in the next chapter? Moses enters into relationship with God. The rest of the book is about

Moses figuring out his identity—who he is and whose he is.

Jesus is in close relationship with God. At his baptism, God says "You are my beloved." God speaks those words again at the Transfiguration. Yet, Jesus' identity is confirmed when 'others' recognize and state that he is the Messiah.

Then, there is Peter. Peter is in relationship with Jesus, who says that he is the rock. Yes, he might have felt as though Peter was as dumb as a rock, or sinks like a rock, but in that moment he recognized Peter as the rock, and the rest of Peter's life (according to Acts of the Apostles) is about others helping him to figure out that unique identity.

Identity. The Church is about helping people figure out who they are by putting them in a relationship with God and with each other. If you were to look at the catechism, you would notice that the church's mission is to reconcile people to God and each other through Jesus Christ. Another word for 'reconcile' is 'relationship.' We are to put people in relationship with God and one another. That is the Church's mission.

Today, we live in a divided world. A world that is full of conflict and one where groups are longing to be heard and understood. How do fulfill our mission?

We do what we do well. We do what we do as Episcopalians every time we gather for worship. We create a space for Holy Communion. We come down the center aisle, as people on the left and people on the right, as people that are in disagreement, and as people that believe all sorts of different things. We come for Holy Communion, a moment where we enter into holy relationship with God and one another. That is the message we are called to proclaim.

But, I think we live at a different point in time. It's hard to go out into the world and say you should come to our church because we have a big inclusive table. The message needs to have more meat on the bones. It needs to stick, and we can make it stick when we draw upon our own personal experience.

When was the time we had the rug ripped out from under our feet? When was a time when we encountered suffering, trials and tribulations, or when we woke up one morning and said, "Who am I? What in the world am I doing with my life?" When was the moment we experienced those things and came to this Church and this table and walked away with a profound sense of grace, knowing who you were and whose you were?

We are to leave this place, sent forth into the world to spread that "good news," the good news of being in relationship with God and with one another, the good news the world desperately needs to hear. Amen.