

'How God sees us' – SJD – 14/5/17 – 1 Peter 2: 4-10

A snake and a rabbit collide at an intersection in the forest. They immediately began to argue blaming each other. The snake remarked that as he had been blind since birth he deserved extra consideration. The rabbit responds that he too has been blind since birth.

The two animals then forget about the collision and began commiserating concerning the problems of being blind. The snake said that his greatest regret was the loss of his identity. He had never been able to see his reflection in the water, and for that reason did not know exactly what he looked like, or even what he was. The rabbit declared that he had the same problem. Seeing a way that they could help each other, the rabbit proposed that one feel the other from head to toe, and then try to identify what the other was. The snake agreed, and started by winding himself around the rabbit. After a few moments, he announced, "You have got very soft, fuzzy fur, long ears, big rear feet, and a little fuzzy ball for a tail. I think that you must be a rabbit!"

The rabbit was much relieved to find his identity, and proceeded to return the favour to the snake. After feeling about the snake's body for a few minutes, he asserted, "Well, you are scaly, you are slimy, you have got beady little eyes, you squirm and slither all the time, and you have got a forked tongue. I think you are a politician!"¹

Identity and status are two of the great issues of our day – and I suspect any period of history. Who we are and therefore of what value we may be are fundamental if we are to develop any true sense of self-worth. Perhaps for many of us our identity has been tied up with the work with did. In that we found a purpose and direction to life. The problem, though, can arise when we retire! Who are we then? Perhaps for others of us our identity revolves around our family. We are mother of ... husband of ... the daughter of ... etc. Of course this always means identifying ourselves in the context of someone else rather than a focus on who we are.

In the Gospel reading² we see the disciples struggling to understand the true identity of Jesus. If they are to relate to him, even follow him, they must be clear who he is. That is why the Gospel narratives change direction after Peter's great statement of faith that Jesus is the Messiah,³ even if it turns out that the disciples don't really understand what the ministry of the Messiah was. However, hindsight is a great thing. And so when one of those same disciples much later comes to write his pastoral letter to the scattered church in parts of modern day Turkey, he is absolutely clear on the identity of Jesus. He is the Son of God-the stone rejected by men, which causes many to stumble yet has become the 'chosen and precious cornerstone'.⁴ This imagery, which Peter draws from Isaiah⁵ is fundamental. The cornerstone was the first stone laid for the Temple. Its positioning determined all the other stones as they were built out from it in all 3 directions. They, in turn, gained their purpose from their position relative to the cornerstone. This means that by gaining a true picture of Jesus's identity they now see themselves more clearly.

So how does God view us? What identity do we have in his eyes? Well you may be surprised by the words Peter chooses to use – adjectives like '**chosen**', '**royal**' & '**holy**'. If those words don't make us feel special then I am not sure what does.

I wonder, if you like me can remember teams being selected at school. What was usually the two best players stood out front choosing a member of their team from those stood there. It was always good to be chosen early and not be left. In the OT, Israel were God's chosen people – but now this transfers to all

¹ source: <http://www.jokebuddha.com/Identity#ixzz4ga2q1vur> (Adapted by NKH)

² John 14 v 4-14

³ Mark 8 v 27-30; Matthew 16 v 13-16; Luke 9 v 18-20.

⁴ 1 Peter 2 v 7b, 8a and 6a.

⁵ Isaiah 28 v 16

Christians. 'You are a chosen people' says Peter. For many people who have struggled to belong anywhere this can be revolutionary. And unlike those two captains choosing their teams, God has not gone out just to select the best! Listen to what Paul writes on this subject.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.⁶

Of course that also means that some of us who were called and chosen by God are wise, influential and even of noble birth but most of us are not – and it doesn't matter! What matters is that God has chosen us – whatever we may think of ourselves we are deeply loved and valued by God! Do you believe that? If not then you are saying that Peter and Paul and even Jesus are liars!

Let me explain how much God really loves and values us. Listen to what Paul writes again: ***'(God) chose us ..before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight'***⁷ But you will say BUT I am not holy and blameless – I know myself well enough that much of my life is spent in failure – failing to live up to God's incredibly high standards. And of course you would be right. But as Paul goes on to explain in Ephesians these qualities of 'holiness' and blamelessness' are not earned but given to us by a loving Father, having been won for us by the Son! That is how much God loves and cares for us.

Which of us seeing a child in need somewhere in the world hasn't felt our heart tugged as we long to do something to help them. The difference with God is that he has stepped out and done all that we need to be restored – into the ones we were originally created to be – a ***'holy nation'***.

But God's love doesn't even stop there – because Peter says we are also a ***royal priesthood'***. We have been adopted into God's royal family – and have received all the privileges of being a full member of that family. We now have such close and easy access to God that it is like that of the OT priesthood – who came into God's presence to make petitions on behalf of the people of Israel.

Above all Peter says, we are a ***'people belonging to God'***.⁸ We have an identity in God because we belong – and that belonging helps us discover the value God places on us, the work he has done for us and the way he wishes us to share this with others. It took Peter many years to come to this understanding. Sadly some people never do. In the home group on alternative Monday nights we have begun a study of Peter's life where we can see how his life was gradually transformed. He discovered his self-worth as he found his identity in God to whom he belonged as a chosen, holy and royal son. The reality is that such a description is God's view of every believer, whatever we may feel about ourselves. May we learn to live with this reality and make it available to others. Amen

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1 v 26-27.

⁷ Ephesians 1 v 4.

⁸ 1 Peter 2 v 9