

## ***I Am Who I Am – Who are you?***

(Matthew 16: 13-28 & Exodus 3:1-15, preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020)

I am who I am- I first used those words on a camp. Late into the evening, camping in a church hall, the girls were chatting into the night – as you do on camp. Under the cover of darkness, safely and snuggly in your sleeping bag, sometimes you have quite deep conversations. All of a sudden, the leader told us off. Incensed and as a young woman finding her voice, I objected to being told off. The leader continued to tell us off. I distinctly remember saying to her, that I wasn't going to stop and she should stop judging me and us, **I am who I am**. Ironically this phrase has come up many times in my formation for ministry – I think it is about, for me, that I bring who I am to the table, I can do no more and I can do no less.

Identity – this is important. As teenagers we begin the search for our own, in mid life we reassess it. In the midst of stage 4 lockdown I think we are asking the same question. With less work, less income, less socialising we do begin to wonder who we are.

As Christians we also ask the question about ourselves and about the God we follow.

This is not new, our foremothers and forefathers, have asked this question too.

Moses, out looking after sheep finds himself asking these questions. A burning bush, an encounter with God and a mission to undertake, he is forced to ask these questions. Unsure of his ability to take the message received from God he needs to ask God who God is. Attracted by a burning bush that was not burnt to a crisp, being called by name, told to take off his shoes – Moses knew he was on holy ground. Having a bit of an identity crisis, he asks God, who would he tell the people had given him this message. God answers 'I Am Who I Am', in Hebrew the word means more – I am who I am and I will be who I will be – a sense of the past, but also of the future. God reveals a little more of his identity in this story – God is mysterious, God is ever present and God is liberator – after all that, is the message Moses is asked to take to the people enslaved in Egypt.

In our gospel reading Jesus asks the disciples who the people think he is. The disciples have a variety of answers – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or a prophet. Jesus presses them a little more and asks them who they think he is. Impetuous Peter responds straight away – the Messiah, the son of the Living God. Correct response but does Peter really know what that means? Jesus goes on to describe what that means – suffering, death, being raised from death. This doesn't fit how Peter understands it, he protests and rebukes Jesus. Jesus reminds him, that, this is how Jesus understands himself and his mission to be.

How would we answer Jesus I wonder? Who do we say Jesus is? Who do we say God is?

In recent times in Matthew we have encountered Jesus being with the people in a variety of ways. I wonder if part of Matthew's answer to the question might be:

- The one who sows seed lavishly
- The one who shares their burdens and helps them carry the yoke of all
- The one who provides sustenance for those who seek him out

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- The one who provides more than they need, there is love leftover
- The one who offers a hand up when they are sinking
- The one who calms and offers peace in the storms of life
- The one who breaks down barriers and reminds all that they are all loved

Who do we say Jesus is? Who do we say God is?

Once we have begun to answer that question, we need to ask ourselves another one.

Who are we?

Who are we as individuals and as a church? What is our identity, if we say, we are followers of Jesus?

God offered Moses part of the answer. Jesus offers Peter and ourselves the beginning of an answer.

We are followers of a God who is mysterious, who is very near, who wants to liberate people and calls us to do seemingly impossible tasks. We are followers of one who takes us his cross, who bears the burden of others, who takes the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Our identity as followers of Jesus is wrapped up in shouldering pain, so that others might know justice, might know the love of God. Our identity is wrapped up in generously sharing what we have, so others might be satisfied. Our identity is wrapped up in holding out our hand, and lifting another person up. Our identity is wrapped up in being the calm presence, in the midst of trouble. Our identity is wrapped up in removing anything that divides one from another. Our identity is wrapped up in liberating others, from whatever binds. Our identity is wrapped up in generously sowing seeds of God's love, everywhere around us. Our identity is wrapped up in bravely sharing God's message, of love, of acceptance, of grace.

God calls himself – I am who I am, I will be who I will be.

Jesus knows his identity the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the one who must suffer and die in order to be raised again, so all might have abundant life.

Who do you say Jesus is? Your answer will shape your life and future, it will shape the lives and future of the world in which we live.

I am who I am, I will be who I will be, says God.

Who are we?

Amen.