

What is Our Identity? What are Our Values?

One of the questions raised in the last year or so of international politics and other domestic events is – Who are we as Canadians?

What does it mean to be Canadian?

What makes us uniquely Canadian? Beyond saying Eh! and Sorry!

What are the values that we hold in common? How do others identify us as Canadian beyond the Canadian flag on our luggage?

When life is peaceful and calm, we do not think much about it, we keep doing what we have always done because that is the way that we have always done it.

During a major snowstorm or a significant power outage, we step up and check in on neighbours and family. Everyone pitches in to shovel driveways and sidewalks. That is the Canadian way.

But, when Alberta threatens to have a referendum on leaving Canada. When Quebec threatens to have yet another referendum. When attacks are made by other countries on the sovereignty of the nation. When there are threats to annex Greenland. It raises the question about - who are we? What is our identity? Who is Canada? What does it mean to be Canadian?

We may respond by buying Canadian to support Canadian companies and business. That may be difficult when Canadian, or at least non-US products are not available or are more expensive. Do we, can we support local? Can we afford the higher prices? The decision making becomes more difficult when we are stressed, or tired or anxious or sick. What does it mean to be Canadian? When life is hard our identity is challenged. We must decide how we will live into our identity as Canadian. It is not always easy.

Jesus is facing questions about his identity. He is famished, he has been fasting for forty days and nights. He is probably also tired and missing his family and friends. He is vulnerable to temptation.

It was in the wilderness for forty years that the Israelites struggled with their identity as people of God. At one point they created the golden calf to worship in place of God.

Rising prices, shifting schedules, and illness can cause stress, exhaustion and anxiety, making it hard for each of us to be the people that God has called us to be

Faced with financial problems, internal disagreements or external threats it can be hard for churches to be the people God had called them to be, to live into their identity.

Jesus was identified by the voice from heaven at his baptism as the Son of God. Yet when the devil tempts him to feed himself when he is so hungry by changing stones into bread using his divine power, Jesus chooses not to escape human suffering. He could prove he is the Son of God by changing stones into to bread but that would be to succumb to the devil's wishes. Later, during his ministry, Jesus will miraculously feed many others. We know the stories of the feeding of the 5,000.

Next the devil challenges Jesus to test God's faithfulness by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple, as the angels would protect him in his fall.

Finally, the devil offers Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will worship the devil. Jesus must decide whom he will serve. Will he serve God, or will he serve evil? He must decide how he will use his authority.

Prosperity, protection and power. These are the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness after his baptism.

Prosperity, protection and power are the temptations that the Israelites faced in the wilderness.

Prosperity, protection and power. These foreshadow what the followers of Jesus will encounter. Through Jesus' miracles the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, the dead are raised, and demons are cast out. These are signs that Jesus is the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

However, if these miracles are the reasons people love Jesus and desire the kingdom, then they are far from the kingdom.

Prosperity, protection and power. These are temptations that we encounter in our daily lives; as individuals and as a community.

We must choose what it means to be a child of God, a follower of Christ. What is our identity? Who are we going to be? How will we respond when we are irritable or tired? Will we take the time to listen to someone who is hurting when we are in a hurry? What are our values?

These same questions of identity are also asked of parishes and the church in general. Who are we going to be as a church? How will we spend our money – on ourselves or on helping others? What are our values? What does it mean for us as a community to be a follower of Christ.

Through his temptations, Jesus shows us that it is when our lives are difficult that we choose who we will be. Like Jesus, we will be hungry. We will have times when we are tempted to doubt God's faithfulness. We will be tempted to reach for power, rather than to live the life of a servant.

To live as a child of God we must serve God even when our circumstances are hard. This is when we choose just what it means to be a child of God.

The devil asked Jesus, "*If* you are the Son of God."

So, we must ask ourselves, *if* we are children of God, who will we be? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Readings: Matthew 4:1-11