



Welcome to our Sunday Service (18/04/21)

The "Who am I?" question

Prepared by Mervyn & Kathryn

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Happy Birthday to...

Diane

(18th April)

Eve

(19th April)



God bless you both!

Lord Jesus, we gladly bow before you today and bring you our praise and adoration, we want to honour your name and lift you up in our hearts and communities. We thank you for your endless love that reaches to our deepest needs, we ask that you would meet our needs today. We enthrone you in our hearts and ask that you would subdue all that is not holy and true. Empower us to glorify your name and be especially close to those who are in pain and unwell. Amen

Labelling things is a really useful way of categorising and identifying things, so that they can be defined, but is a label necessarily a correct identification and can it be mis-leading? I suspect that most of us have been to the shop to buy something, only to discover when we got home that it had the wrong label on the box and what is inside is actually something very different.

We often label ourselves incorrectly, but sadly that label has established itself and become our perceived identity.

I'm a loser, waste of space, a mistake, no good at anything, fat and ugly, rubbish, unwanted, accident prone, bad, weird, a burden, thick, confused, the black sheep, a dis-appointment... on and on we could go!



Where does our skewed sense of identity come from? Who told you that you were worthless, or ugly or a piece of rubbish. That identity may have been put on you by cruel words from other people, but essentially our perceived identity comes from our feelings rather than being rooted in truth.

So if we have come to accept our feelings about ourselves as our true identity, is that it **or** Is there a journey to take to realign our negative, unhealthy, dead-end labels to the one which God gives us to flourish in as we journey with him?

The “Who Am I?” question!

Today we want to spend some time thinking about this question and the labels that we can attach to ourselves. Labels which may prevent us from walking in our true identity and finding fulfilment in pursuing our God-given destiny. One of the greatest tragedies must surely be to one day meet Jesus and realise that we missed out on who we could have been, and the adventure we could have taken with him in his big story.

There is often a huge difference between how we see ourselves and how God sees us! In the bible

Gideon labelled his clan as the weakest, and himself as the weakest member of his family, but God saw him as a mighty warrior and had a specific purpose for him.

People labelled **Sarah** as a 90 year old, barren woman, way past child bearing age, but God saw her as the mother of a nation

David's older brothers labelled him as an insignificant shepherd, but God saw him as a king.

Mephibosheth, having been dropped as a child was lame in both feet and labels himself as a ‘dead dog’, but God through David brings him into the palace to the Kings table as a son, and ensures that he is provided for.

Had these people just accepted those identification labels, they would not have participated, or been key players in some of the most awesome stories of God -at -work in our world!

At some point, they took a journey with God to move beyond their self labelling, and they must be so glad that they did!

Our sense of who we are and our value as a person can be swayed by a whole host of factors. We all have a unique set of feelings and view of ourselves that flows from how we process a wide range of things, such as the culture we are born into, influences from our families, peer group, media, and home environment. Our position within our family (like Gideon), our financial status or our physical health (like Mephibosheth). Our feelings are also coloured by our intellectual abilities, our personality type, disposition, interests, achievements and failures... the list goes on. In fact, we are being bombarded by information and ideas much of the time and as we filter this data, bits and pieces lodge in our hearts and minds as we try to work out who we are and where we fit.

Sometimes what feels like truth to us is actually a lie, yet is powerful enough to stick and become our label of identity. The most beautiful person may label themselves ugly, someone who is dangerously underweight may label themselves as fat. A capable, gifted individual has been labelled as someone who will never amount to anything and that label has become ‘their truth’.



Increasingly, our culture disregards the words of God over human identity as the key to flourishing and fulfilment. The church in general has sometimes been very vocal in its condemnation of the forsaking of truth, and yet hasn't always demonstrated the acceptance and compassion of God to those struggling with identification labels that don't fit with God's design.

Rather than showing love, and journeying in compassion with an individual who is struggling with a damaged identity, supporting and encouraging them into God's calling, churches have sometimes ostracised, berated, threatened and poured shame and condemnation on those who may be struggling.

I heard a story a couple of years ago of a teenage boy who attended a church service with his grandparents and after the service overheard a conversation between his grandparents and some older members of the church who were being ruthlessly condemnatory about people who struggle with the very same identity issue that he was secretly struggling with. Later that week, that young lad took his own life, so great was his despair following his visit to church.

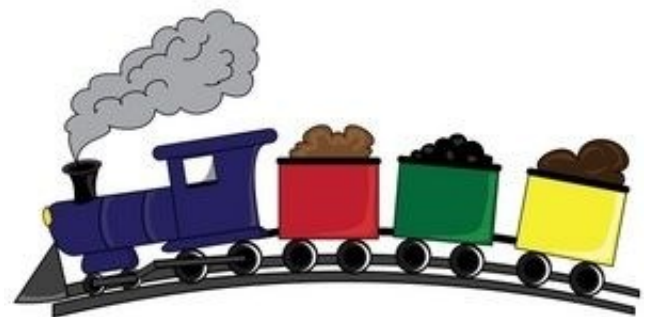
Many churches have been really hot on upholding the truth of what the bible says about who we are, but at the same time failed to demonstrate the love and compassion of God and the hope of a new identity as a child of God.

Our culture today, on the other hand has become very good at showing kindness and acceptance, facilitating the expression of any perceived truth we may hold and in some cases even celebrates and normalises any broken form of identity that we may use to define ourselves, but is that approach truly loving?

Love and Truth go hand in hand if we want to discover who we really are in God's sight and who he made us to be in his story. Truth without love is cold, condemning and brings despair. Love without truth short -changes us and fails to give us a clear path to discover our true God-given identity.

Sometimes true love says no.

When I think of truth and love I sometimes have the picture of railway lines, two equally valid solid metal tracks going along together at exactly the right distance apart to allow the train to travel along. Working together in harmony, truth and love provide clear lines and boundaries on which to live out our lives. However remove one, or even slightly move one and the train has to stop or worse still derail. In recent times the tracks of love and truth in our society have been ripped up in unprecedented ways, leaving so many people stranded and confused. Interestingly as these tracks are ripped up and redefined, it would appear that mental health has been affected in devastating ways rather than bringing the liberated life that society seeks to provide.



Truth and love are demonstrated most gloriously on the cross, where the truth of our sinfulness met with the greatness of God's love.

Thankfully, there is a constant voice of love that faithfully and patiently speaks truth into our lives, so today lets take time to tune into *this* voice. God's voice.

Here is Paul working through some of his identity structures and coming to a wonderful conclusion in Philippians Ch 3:3-9

We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

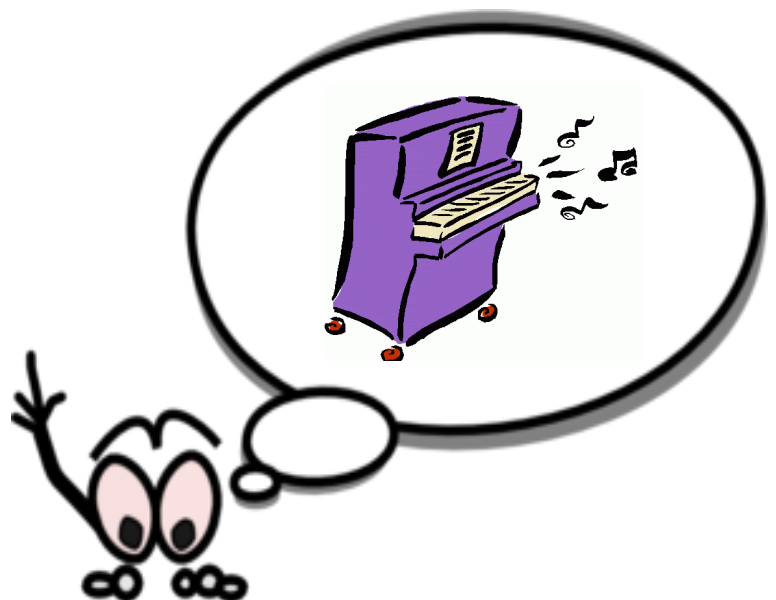
I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.

As Paul journeys with Jesus, he is realising that his identity, his definition does not come from his education, his position in society, his achievements, his hard work, or his feelings about himself - which for him seemed to be feelings of massive self-confidence! Instead, in the light of who he is and the value he has in knowing Jesus Christ as Lord, and becoming one with him, everything else he might use to define himself is junk by comparison.

I tend to think in pictures! One of the ways that helps me to get a grasp on the concept of identity and the “Who am I” question is to look at a piano!

My piano has 85 keys, 85 different notes and I like to think of myself as one of those keys! In a moment , I will be taking this piano apart and looking briefly at some of the lessons it teaches us.

My prayer is that each one of us would discover some keys that will help *us* to unlock who we are ‘in Christ,’ and to journey into the identity and the destiny God has for each one of us.



The first thing we need to establish is that this piano does not exist by accident! Everything about it was planned, carefully crafted and skilfully put together.

Here is the first key to our identity. We are lovingly made by God.

Not one human being is an accident. **Psalm 139** is a celebration of God carefully crafting us at just the right time - **“You knit me together in my mother’s womb, I am fearfully and wonderfully made”**. **Ephesians 1:4**. **For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**



Whatever the circumstances surrounding your arrival in this world, whatever was said to you about being a mistake, or whatever your feelings tell you about whether you were wanted or not, God loves you. There is no question of you being a mistake, God planned for you to be here and had you in his heart before he even created the world for you to live in. Your identity may be powerfully rooted in a lie that has become ‘your truth’, but you CAN with God’s help surrender that perceived truth to the greater truth that you are made and loved by God. The feelings produced by that lie that you have believed may not disappear overnight, but as you journey with God, they will be replaced by a secure, joyful excitement as you discover what it means to be fully adopted by God, and to find your place in the world as his child. This piano is not a random accident and neither are you.

Here is a second key to our identity. You and I are absolutely necessary in God’s story. There is a part for you to play which is connected to all the other parts, and without you, the story is incomplete.

Every single note on this piano is unique and needed for the music to be complete. Not one single note can truthfully say, “I’m not needed, I don’t amount to anything, I’m a waste of a note!” On the flip side, neither can one single note say... “It’s all about me, my note is the most important, every other note must conform to the sound that I make.” Can you imagine the din if one note decided it didn’t feel like a G# and all the other notes had to celebrate that it was choosing to identify as a D flat instead, rejecting the note it was created to be and the part it was designed to play?

Our culture has become increasingly self obsessed, where often the focus *is* all about *me and my* feelings and *my* truth. That individualism has a diminished concept of community and commitment to others. A perceived truth has the potential to ensnare us in an emotional cul-de-sac leaving us isolated, lonely and missing out on the joy of being in community, unable to rise up to play our part in the bigger story.

Ephesians 2 10 says “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Here is a third key to our identity. We need to be regularly affirmed in God's presence!

The notes that make up this piano can frequently lose their unique identity and if this piano had never been tuned, then each note would not even have a correct identity! Assuming the piano was alive of course, without regular tuning, it would have no sense of what note it was or what sound that note makes, or any sense whatsoever of where it fits in the framework of the piano! It requires a tuner who has the perfect knowledge of what each note *should* sound like to come with his tuning fork and carefully, little by little tighten the string until the note is true to the note it was designed to be and able to sound correctly in alignment with the other notes.



If the strings could feel that tightening process, it may be a bit uncomfortable having to push through to new levels of tuning, but here's a classic example of how love and truth work together. The love and dedication the tuner has to each individual note is unquestionable, and yet truth says..."In order for you to be the note you were designed to be and play your part in this piano, I need to tighten this string for you to fully be a note that is fulfilling your destiny". Without the truth of God's tuning fork we may not ever realise we were out of tune and not where we should be, but truth alone can't help us. We constantly need the love and care of God, our 'tuner' to gently transform us. It can take courage to surrender *our* identification labels to our heavenly father and allow him to 'tune' us to the identity he designed us for. It may take time, it may require us to come to him honestly and admit that our perceptions of who we are have made some mess. It may need someone trust worthy who loves you to come alongside and walk with you, encouraging you, someone you may want to give permission to ask 'how's it going?'

Here is a fourth key to our identity. We belong.

These notes are part of a family community where each one matters and each has a place where they belong with an essential role. We are adopted into God's family and have a place at his table, as his children a place where we truly belong. We are fully accepted and truly loved, loved so much that our Father cannot allow us to settle for a false identity that prevents us from flourishing in his love, reaching our potential, walking in our destiny. Whether our feelings identify us as useless, unwanted, unlovable or just a nothing with nothing to offer, that is a LIE. You are loved, wanted, created with seeds of giftedness and purpose with a special place in God's heart, his family and his world, both now and in the future. You most definitely belong and you are essential. However alien that may sound to you, dare to question the feelings that say otherwise and invite God to show you the incredible way that he sees you, the person you can be and the things you can do wearing his label

Is it really worth it? After all, you may have worn a particular label for so long, you cannot imagine anything else. To be his child is the greatest, most liberating, most fulfilling identity you can possibly have. Why not surrender 'your truth' to his bigger truth about you and discover the life in all it's fulness that he promises.

A piano is made to be played, to make beautiful music, be part of celebration, to joyfully join with other instruments and singers in a crescendo of stunning sound. We are created in the image of God, to enjoy God's glory and as his child to be a reflector of his glory in this world and for all eternity. This is my identity and my destiny !



Let's pray...

Lord I bring to you all the unhelpful ways I have defined myself. I want to surrender my perceived truth to your truth about me. I want to be your child and learn what that means. I want to discover who you made me to be and all the things you have planned for me. I acknowledge that you are the truth, the way for me to walk in and the only one who can give me real, overflowing life. Thank you that you completely understand my vulnerability to lies, please forgive me where I have made choices that have hurt other people and myself. I open myself to your deeper healing again today. Help me to play my part in your story and fulfil my destiny. In Jesus name I pray.

Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now, and evermore. Amen.