

There are so many labels we can use to identify who we are. Political parties, job titles, relational names, alma maters, given names, nicknames.

If someone asked me to identify myself, I'd probably say I'm. . .

- a wife, mom, daughter, sister, Episcopal priest & dog rescuer;
- someone who loves the performing arts;
- a friend who listens;
- a good cook and crafter who hates housework.

These labels tell others how I see myself.

It's not often that we ask OTHERS to tell us "who am I?" or "Who do you say I am."

Was Jesus doing a focus group with his disciples or testing them in this moment?

What do you think?

He certainly was gathering information. Some people saw him as a particularly notable prophet and teacher. Others were confusing him with his recently beheaded cousin John. Ok. Now he has a sense of his audience.

However, Jesus wants to know who the *disciples* say he is. Where are they now that they've seen the miracles he has done. Has there been a breakthrough in their understanding of his ministry? Have the last few days revealed anything?

Walking on water, being fed twice in miraculous fashion, did these events bring about Peter's revelation? If Peter's statement truly came from God, as Matthew writes, was that Jesus' final directive for the march into Jerusalem? Perhaps, Jesus needs a reality check – am I on the right track or do I need to change course?

Sometimes you need feedback from the people you trust. That feedback might confirm what you thought you knew. It might also send you in another direction.

We see Moses being cast into the Nile and then rescued and adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter. The next few weeks of readings from Exodus take us directly from his adoption to leading the Hebrew people out of bondage. We skip the part where he finds out that he's not really of Pharaoh's lineage. He seeks out and finds his birth family, goes out to meet them, sees the cruelty imposed upon them, and ends up killing an Egyptian overseer. Oops.

Then, self-exiled, he finds Zipporah and settles down and has a family until he climbs Mt. Sinai one day and talks to a burning bush. At that point his life's purpose completely changes direction.

I've noticed that people who have been adopted often search for their birth parents to help them understand who they are. It isn't that they don't love their adoptive parents, but there is something to the history of their adoption journey that they just need to know.

Web businesses like Ancestry.com are booming with people looking for 'where they come from'. Do my forebears' story make a difference in who I am today. What difference does it make if you are from Europe or South American? For some people, it's a revelation!

Looking up your family tree can be a fun project, until it isn't. Lives have been changed forever by submitting a DNA sample and finding out there is a half-sibling somewhere that no one disclosed.

Listening to my grandmother's stories about her family were entertaining until she got to the tale of one of her cousins being poisoned by his wife. Think Arsenic and Old Lace.

There had to be times when Moses regretted finding out his true heritage. Yet, he responded to God's call and to a higher purpose than he'd ever expected. I have no doubt that Jesus would have preferred to be the teacher and prophet that most people thought he was. Peter's confession wouldn't let him stay there. These lessons invite us to think deep down about who we really are and what difference our relationship with Christ makes to us.

Interesting, isn't it, that the label "Christian" didn't come to the top of my identity list. It didn't come up even though following the teachings of Jesus is something I take seriously and work hard to do. These days the label "Christian" leaves so many with a bad impression. I don't like using it most of the time.

That makes me think. How much of NOT using that descriptor for myself is playing into the hands of those who make it a bad impression? If I'm not a child of God first and foremost, then who am I? If I don't embrace that identity first and foremost, what kind of relationship can I have with others?

Jesus wanted to know what kind of relationship the disciples wanted with him.

Was it simply a student/teacher situation here or something with higher purpose?

Peter wanted the higher purpose.

So do I. And, I hope you do too.

I can do and be all those things I listed before. Doing them accepting my identity as a child of God and follower of Jesus gives those callings a higher purpose. They become a part of sharing God's kingdom, of sharing the Good News. That identity helps me proclaim that we are all loved by our Creator, saved by our Redeemer, and made worthy by our Sanctifier.

Remembering my adoption by God, and knowing that all people are similarly adopted, informs how I treat the people I meet every day. It informs my stewardship of money and space and time. It informs how I will participate in the democracy in which we live.

Remember – you are marked as Christ’s own forever. Give some thought as to how your relationship with God in Christ informs your identity. What difference might that make in how you go forward from here?

Amen.