
Order of Service (bulletin)

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Video (recorded live stream)

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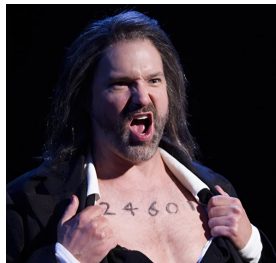
Pentecost 13

Exodus 1:22 - 2:10

The Pharaoh then commanded all those in Egypt, "Let every boy that is born to the Hebrews be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live." There was a man from the house of Levi who had married a Levite woman, and she conceived and gave birth to a boy. And she saw that the baby was good, so she hid it for three months. When she could hide the baby no longer, she took a papyrus basket, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and put the child in it, and placed the basket among the reeds by the banks of the Nile. The baby's sister watched from a distance to learn what would happen. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe, while her attendants worked along the river bank. She noticed the basket among the reeds and sent her attendant to fetch it. Opening it, she saw the baby - and how it wept! She was moved to pity and said, "This must be one of the Hebrews children!" Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Do you want me to go and find a nurse for you among the Hebrews to suckle a child for you?" "Yes, go" she answered. So the sister went off and brought the baby's own mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her "Take this child with you and suckle it for me, and I myself will pay you." The woman took the child and nursed it. After the child was weaned, she brought it to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted it as her own. She called him Moses - "He Who Pulls Out" - for she said, "I pulled him out of the water."

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, he asked the disciples this question: "What do people say about who the Chosen One is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptizer, others say Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "And you," he said, "who do you say that I am?" "You are the Messiah," Simon Peter answered, "the Firstborn of the Living God!" Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon ben-Jonah! No mere mortal has revealed this to you, but my Abba God in heaven. I also tell you this: your name now is "Rock," and on bedrock like this I will build my community, and the jaws of death will not prevail against it. "Here — I'll give you the keys to the reign of heaven: whatever you declare bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you declare loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then Jesus strictly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.



*Can I condemn this man to slavery? Pretend I do not feel his agony?
This innocent who bears my face, who goes to judgment in my place.
Who am I? Who am I? I'm Jean Valjean.
And so Javert, you see it's true. This man bears no more guilt than you.*

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Who am I? 2 4 6 0 1!

Jean Valjean finally is honest about his whole self, not just the parts of his life that he wanted the world to know. Javert couldn't see the full person Jean Valjeau was. All he could see was his criminal past.

We are complex creatures and seldom can the totality of us of "me" be summed up with a simple word or phrase.

April 1963, my first breath. Others defined who I was. They noticed things dangling between my legs and said, "It's a boy." I assume. Parents gave me a name. The surname, as custom in our culture, would come from my father that he got from his father. My unique name that people would know me by was given to me: Blaine. I don't know why that name was chosen other than I know my parents liked the name. My other name, Terrence, would be given to me after a friend of my father. But for some reason, the parents felt that Blaine Terrence Gregg didn't roll off the tongue very easily, so that I would be Terrence Blaine Gregg but it was chosen for me that I would go by my middle name.

Who am I? I'm Terrence Blaine Gregg. Although, I have to listen for all the various combinations or assumptions of that name. If I'm in a waiting room, I have to listen for Greg, Gregory, Terrence, Terry, Blaine, Blair, Blake, or any combination thereof. People aren't being mean. They're not intentionally being inaccurate to who I am. It's just a name, but it's my name and it's part of my identity.

Jesus asked questions about the assumptions that others were making. First Jesus asked it in a third person way. Who do people say that the Ben-Adam, the son of man, the chosen one is? And they said, well, people think that the ben-adam is a prophet. And they might even say it's a prophet returned from the days of old. Maybe a recent prophet like John the Baptist who had recently been executed. Maybe it's an older prophet like Elijah or even Jeremiah. Or there's a whole bunch of prophets being talked about. Even though Jesus spoke in the third person, the disciples would have intuitively knew that he was asking about himself.

Who do others say I am? What are they saying about me?
You're a prophet.

The next question was more direct. We're going to move to the specific person of Yeshua Ben Yoseph, Jesus the son of Joseph. and a direct question to the disciples, not about what rumors have you heard, but who do you say that I am? It's not a report about outside opinions. You're not just giving me the the lay of the land. I want to know just between us, who am I to you? It was Shimon Ben-Yonah, Simon, son of John, who blurts out, "You are the firstborn of the living God, the Messiah, the anointed one."

Jesus had names that people knew him by. Yeshua. The Aramaic version of Yahosua or Joshua, Jesus, his name. He would have been known as Joseph's son, Ben-Yoseph. Simon, named Shimon. He was the son of John: Ben-Yonah. They carried those names from birth. It drew them back into their past.

And then there are descriptors of Jesus. He's the Ben-adam, the son of man, the son of humanity, the son of Adam. In today's Inclusive Bible reading, chosen one. Jesus is also described as a prophet, described as the firstborn of the living God, described as anointed by God, Messiah. These are titles given to Jesus by others. These are titles that were thrust upon Jesus as people tried to describe a characteristic about who Jesus was. And also in this story we get to hear about new names given to people given by others. The nickname Simon: you are now Chephas (Aramaic for rock). the Greek language that the New Testament was written in: Petros

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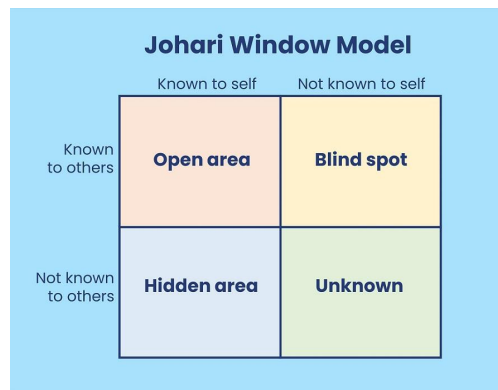
which is simply a male version of Greek female noun rock Petra. Petros becomes Peter when we anglicized. That name stuck and we know it stuck because long before this story is told in the Gospel of Matthew this person was already being called Peter earlier in the book.

I think most sermons at this point on this “who am I” passage will focus on who Jesus was for the disciples, who Jesus was to his community around him and who Jesus became for the church that grew in his wake. But I feel more inclined to just speak more broadly on the question of who am I?

It always depends on who's being asked, doesn't it? Am I asking that of others? Who do you say that I am? Am I asking that of myself? Who am I? And those answers (what other people say about me and what I say about myself) might be quite different. I might be harder on myself than others. Others might be harder on me than I would like.

In 1955, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram came up with a way to sort of discuss how we can look at ourselves.

Joseph and Harry came up with what is known as the Johari Window.



The box represents everything about you or about me, about anyone. And you can see the left hand column there. That's who do I say that I am, what's known to me. The top row is who do you say I am, what's known to others? You can see there's some overlap. There's some things that I know about myself and you know about myself, but there's things that I know about me that I don't necessarily let the world know. That's hidden. But it can be made visible to others and move into the open area in a couple different ways. Think of it as my personal little lock box or my closet. I can choose to come out of my closet or I can be outed, forced out of my closet. Be very different experiences if I'm not ready for the world to know that part of me. The most challenging place in the window is the blind spot. That's something others have discovered about me that I'm not aware of yet. I'm too close to see it. There are very practical examples... like the minister stole is crooked; somebody's fly is undone; there is something in their teeth. There are some people who are very good at exposing someone's blind spot to them often out of compassion. But you can imagine there are more serious aspects about ourselves that we may not be ready to learn even about ourselves... yet. And so how we move from that blind spot into the open area can be really challenging and it can strengthen or it can ruin relationships. That unknown box is the mystery. And if it is to become known, it very seldom moves directly on the diagonal to the open area that everybody gets it. It usually makes its way into the open, if it ever does, through others or through ourselves.

I embrace the totality of the identity that I was given at birth, the assumptions that were made about me when I took that first breath. I am Terrence Blaine Gregg, son of Ward and Dorothy, brother to Shauna. I'm a human male with dangly bits between my legs. But that's not everyone's story, is it? For some people the name they

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were given doesn't resonate. And maybe there's a nickname that is stuck that everybody knows. Or maybe there is a name that was chosen in another way that you've always felt was your name. Some people have the courage to make that official. They might simply say, "Just start calling me this." And some might even go through all the paperwork and the expense of making it legal to change your name legally and live with confusion for the next couple years while the systems catch up while the friends and family get used to something different. And that's okay.

Gender is fluid. It's not limited to the bits. Sometimes what's visible isn't what's real. And so we identify differently than what others might see. Ultimately, these kind of self-discoveries lead to a more public facing identity.

We take those hidden areas of ourselves, how I would like to be addressed, how I would like to present, how you can describe me to others, what pronouns you might use for me and bring them out in the open so that can be the most accurate reflection of who I am. All that's ever asked for is a kind and respectful response. Call people by their chosen name. Accept their chosen identity as a fact because it is. It's their fact. We just simply observe it. Accept the world in the way that the person sees themselves. Let's accept the word of the one who knows most about me... and that's **me**. If I say this is who I am, that's who I am. It's not for you to question. It's for you to simply say great, nice to meet you. Let's move on to something else to get to know each other beyond how you look, how you present, and how you like to be called.

The Bible doesn't tell us what Amram and Jochebed named their youngest child, the younger brother Miriam and Aaron. As we heard this morning, the baby was born at a risky time for Hebrew boys in Egypt. The pharaoh was worried about the growing size of this self-identifiable Hebrew community and came up with a horrific population control method to quell the possibility of this group joining with enemies to maybe attack them in the future. All baby boys for a generation were to be snuffed out to slow down the population growth.

The first plan was passive: have the midwives kill the children soon after they were born. If it's a boy, kill it. If it's a girl, let it live. That didn't work well enough. The wonderful irony of that story is that Pharaoh wasn't concerned about the women, but it's the women who messed up his plans. The female midwives said, "Oh, they give birth just so fast. We don't get a chance to kill the baby before it's born." So then it's on to the killing squad option: raids into Hebrew communities, pulling toddlers out of their homes, babies off their mother's breast. So maybe Jochebed and Amram didn't want to name their third child because they didn't think he had much chance in this life in Pharaoh's world. Every time the rumors of the killing squads came to their community, they hid him. And they did it really successfully for a while. And we heard the story about the final time that they hid him in a basket that was made especially to be able to float in the river without being filled with water; hide it in the reeds near the shore; older sister watching over it to make sure it was fine before taking her baby brother home. But on this day, the basket is discovered by an Egyptian woman. Not only any Egyptian woman, the Pharaoh's daughter. You can imagine how Mariam's heart sank. But again, Pharaoh's plans were messed up by the women. His own daughter knew that this was a Hebrew child being hidden from her own father's death squads and she said, "I'm going to save this one baby." She gave him a new identity. She raised him as a child of Egypt. She gave him an Egyptian name, Moses, drawn out. And in wonderful twist of fate, Jochebed was hired to be her own son's wet nurse. Moses would grow up in the house of Pharaoh, but there would be much more about who he was that he would discover and others would discover over time. And we're going to hear a little bit more about that in the coming weeks as the Bible readings take us through some of the Moses stories.

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Who do others think I am? That's the rumor question. You're a prophet. That's the very public facing stuff. What do I expose to the world? What's on my social media? It's a different question to say to those who've gotten to know me a little better.

Who do you think I am? You knew more than the surface. You've got observations. You've got some wellfounded assumptions to draw.

But the best question is the same question John Valjean asked of himself. Who am I? Can I be honest with myself about my full self as much as I can know in those three areas at this time? Am I open to accepting that I still don't know the whole story?

Jesus, you're the Messiah, the son of the living God. And Jesus acknowledged that that was very insightful, Simon. That's really insightful. It's like a bedrock foundation of what we're going to be about. But even Jesus said, "Let's keep that in the closet for a little while. I'm not quite ready for everyone to know that yet because **who am I** is a process of discovery and ideally it's at the comfortable pace built in our own honesty.

Am I who I want to be? Are there adjustments that I can make to be the more better person that I'd like to be? We all do that. We all adjust and flow through life. We learn from mistakes. We learn the lessons that others have taught. It's definitely an individual journey of self-discovery. But as Jesus very quickly also moved past Simon's discovery and thought about the whole of the community. Pharaoh was not worried about a few baby boys, but the power that maybe the wider community could represent.

Churches like Spirit of Hope often work hard to discover and proclaim who we are and who we can be and who we would like to be. So we create mission and vision statements and we're always asking who can we be. We re-evaluate and keep growing that top left box of the window... the honest truth of who am I?

May we together pledge to move forward so that we can be who we can be and who we want to be. Thanks be to God. Amen.

#85MV Take, O Take Me As I Am

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg