

TEXT: Mark 1:9-13
TITLE: Who Are You?
BOTTOM LINE: Be Who You Are

Eugene First UCC
October 10, 2021
Message by Jessica Shine

INTRO STORY: Who Are You?

Shaun works as a valet alongside his best friend Katy, who he's known ever since he came to America in his early teens. Shaun *seems like a 20-something* ambitionless man on the outside, but the truth is he came to the U.S. to escape the hold of his father Wenwu, a powerful warlord and leader of an organization known as the Ten Rings. Wenwu made sure that his son was trained as an assassin early on, something that Shaun tried to reject for as long as possible – but now, the past comes roaring back when a pack of assassins corners him on a SF city accordion bus. Katy looks at them sideways and says - you have the wrong guy, does he look like he can fight?

Having no choice, Shaun enters an epic fight for his life as the bus races through downtown San Francisco. After watching this martial arts mastery, Katy looks at Shaun stupefied and asks 'Who are you?' She sees the possibility that the entirety of her relationship with this person wasn't real.

Katy realizes that though they've been friends for over a decade, she has no clue who Shaun really is. Who are you? She demands.

Who are you?

So Eugene First... who are you? I've read the profile you prepared, talked to your allies, read articles, but who are you? Really?

Who are you to those who don't vote like you? Look like you? Weren't vax'd like you?

Who are you to each other? Who are you to your families, neighbors, and to this community?

Some of you are thinking, wow, really good question, rest - WHO ARE YOU?

I am the daughter of Francis and Sharon and Johnny, the grandchild of Carmelita, Bacho, Barbara, Jim, and Daisy. I am the youngest child and the middle child of a blended family. I am the descendant of immigrants from India, Mexico, and western Europe who met here on Turtle Island. I am a musician, a leader, and a servant. I am queer and whole and growing.

My name is Jessica Shine and I bring you greetings from your friends who serve with me at the national setting of the United Church of Christ. I'm joined today by my wife, Deshna. Our 17yo daughter Kaila is exercising her social butterfly skills

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today back in Portland. We are native best-coasters, all born in California and transplanted to the PNW. I kinda wanted to intro myself like one of our staff did last week when I met with them on zoom - Hi, I'm Jessica and I like chocolate, puppies, the color blue and long walks on the beach.

Instead, I'll do a speed round stay with me - I've been playing, writing and singing music since I was a teenager, I love to cook (and eat), I love language y Si hablo espanol, I'm a Giants fan and I'll keep on believing, I've traveled to 15 countries, done something David Beckham failed at, led my own congregation, prepared chaplains for ordination, and have served the church for almost 25 years. I love Jesus and I love people.

I am delighted to be with you today and thank you to all the folks who made today possible, arranging rooms, re-arranging wifi, and planning. Please thank these folks.

I wanted to share with you today stories of calling, of my call to ministry and to wrestle with you in where God is calling you to go. But as I looked to the Scriptures, to one of my favorite Scriptures I realized that's not where I want to start.

So often in prophetic communities and movements for justice, there is an emphasis on doing: where is the next march, what banner do we hang, where do we send our money, or not? And these are good questions.

But prophetic movements and communities are learning that in order to avoid burnout they must not only ask what are we called to DO.... But WHO ARE WE called to BE? **Who are we?**

When we are rooted in that truth, like the vine in Jesus' teaching we bear much fruit.

TEXT: Mark 1:9-13 I can think of no better definition of who I am than in this passage.

According to the author Jesus has arrived in Galilee to be baptized by his cousin John.

READ V10-11

Before Jesus is called out to the desert, before Jesus even calls disciples, Jesus' identity is established. And I wonder if that is the invitation for us also?

1) First the voice says, "You are my Son" in other words YOU BELONG

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IL: Exclusion is damaging because it actually hurts, Harvard Bus Review article on “The Value of Belonging at Work” 4 authors write that the sensation is akin to physical pain!

Social belonging is a fundamental human need, hardwired into our DNA. And yet, 40% of people say that they feel isolated at work, and the result is lower organizational commitment and engagement. In a nutshell, we are blowing it b/c we spend nearly 8 billion dollars each year on diversity and inclusion trainings that miss the mark because they neglect our need to feel included.

In other words, diversity doesn't equate to belonging.

IL: Coming out later in life is in some ways more challenging, coming out in an evangelical family can be downright impossible. As I look back at my life, there were many times when I wanted to share my questioning with my family. To understand myself, to feel ok in my body. I wish I would have heard the words in the story today when I was asking myself and the adults in my life - Who am I?

To hear YOU ARE MINE, YOU BELONG would have been reassuring to a young person who felt weird on the outside and on the inside of their body.

I wonder if there's someone here today who needs to hear YOU BELONG. You are a child of God. Are you a community who reminds folk - YOU BELONG?

2) Second the voice of the Divine says, “whom I love”

Gk LOVE = ἀγαπητός the same word Jesus uses when he questions Peter, do you love me? Then feed my sheep. Is is the transcendent Love, the translation is the Beloved.

IL: I remember the first time Deshna said I love you... I was terrified, because I felt like I was going to explode if I didn't say out loud how I felt about her. We had been bantering about like two yahoos, I like you, no but I like really like you...

But before I could get it out of my mouth, at the end of our date she whispered in my ear, I love you. You remember that feeling? Prophet Mevlana Jalalladin calls it the meeting of The Lover and Beloved. It's the sense of alignment of integrated self understanding - You are Loved.

What if in this moment of social and political unrest, we are being called not only to do but to be reminded of who we are? What if we begin or continue the work by being rooted in the truths that we belong and we are Beloved?

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In this moment described in Mark, at Jesus' baptism heaven explodes because God cannot restrain Godself, they must tell everyone who this is. I wonder if one reason many folks are reticent of Christianity (even prog xianity) is because we have told them believing is more important than Beloving. What if instead we reminded folk - you are Beloved, just as you are. Just as I am without one plea. I don't need you to believe this story is true, I need you to know who you are - this is a great place to start.

3) Third the voice says, "with you I am well pleased"

GK eudokeo, pleased, think highly but a better translation is "I am resolved", in other words there is no room for doubt, there is no manipulating or chance of reconsideration.

IL: Often in American Xianity we have a Frenemies view of God. Know Frenemy? 2 "friends" go weekend fishing, one sleeps with his shoes on. Friend says - why you do that? Bear... you can't outrun a bear, no I just have to outrun you!

God is not a Frenemy - someone we have to walk on eggshells with
That's how we can sing - Great is thy Faithfulness, O God Creator
There is NO shadow of turning with thee...

TEXT-I have resolved in my being how I feel about you, so be who you are!

If we are made in the image of the divine, how could God not take joy in you?
Maybe you're here or watching and still have that story - you're broken, lacking, or something is wrong with you, asking Who Am I?

You belong, You are Beloved, Heaven is resolved in joy for you

There's a reason the author captures this experience at Jesus' Baptism where the sky is opened, a dove appears, and the voice of God is heard. I don't have time to unpack all the symbolism here... in baptism folk would get undressed, remove their outer clothes. Entering the water to be washed, to remove what no longer serves you and to emerge in your full identity. What Mark is alluding to is that there is an invitation to vulnerability, to releasing what no longer serves you, and to showing up fully.

The author starts the first two parts of this declaration with the GK article 'o' - You are mine, I love you.....but this third (I'm resolved that you bring me joy) begins with 'w'. What does this mean? When used in this way the omicron can refer to a specific individual, same root as microscope - I can see into you. And all those

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little parts of you no one else sees - you are mine all your pieces, I love all those little parts that make you who you are. When you are vulnerable I see who you are and you are Beloved.

When the voice finishes this message it uses an omega - which is the word for large or great, or totality.

It's as though the Divine is saying I see your inner heart and I love you. And I am resolved in how I feel about humanity, your relatives. I am resolved in how I feel about you, there is no teetering. You are mine, You are Beloved, This is who you are. Can you please remind your siblings of this every once in a while?

CLOSING IL: I was in seminary and visiting family in Birmingham, England

My uncle insisted I attend worship with my family at their Gurdwara, which I was thrilled about. Five tenets of Sikhism - hospitality, what college kid doesn't love free food.

Uncle told the Priest I was studying for ministry

Priest gives us a tour, gets to upper temple uncle has never been 40yrs

Priest tells me stories about the Bhagavad Gita, stories similar to Hebrew

Looks at me and asks ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

Says BE WHO YOU ARE

You're a Christian? Be a Xian, be a Muslim, be Sikh

BE WHO YOU ARE - let your doing come from your BEING, be sure you know who you are then BE WHO YOU ARE

So Eugene First Who are you? As individuals, family, community of faith?

Today the invitation is here, rooted in these truths:

You are a child of God, You are Beloved

Your existence is a manifestation of Divine Joy, of Love Supreme

Be Who You Are