

02/14/18 @ BUCYRUS UMC – ASH WEDNESDAY

TITLE: WHO AM I?

TEXT: LUKE 18:9-14

SCRIPTURE: JOEL 2:1-2,12-17a & PSALM 51:1-12

I – WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?:

If you were here Sunday morning you heard me preach on the subject of Jesus asking his disciples then and now the question, “WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?” I then told you that this year during the season of lent we would look at that question and try to answer it using Jesus’ own words as we find them in the Gospel of John.

There is another question we have to ask and answer before we can truly discover and understand fully who Jesus is. The first question we need to tackle is this: “WHO AM I?” Our understanding of Jesus will be based on our understanding of ourselves, because the two are in relationship to each other.

We went over some of the possible answers to this question on Sunday as we looked at the different roles we play in the lives of others. In our families we found that we are mothers or fathers, sons or daughters, as well as brothers and sisters and maybe grandparents. To some we are coworkers and to others friends. We may have the role of policeman or paramedic as well as teacher or office manager. This list could go on and on, but to really answer the question properly when it has to do with Jesus we have to answer another question...a tough and personal question...

II – WHO AM I IN GOD’S EYES?:

...when God looks at me...what does God see? Who am I in God’s eyes? This is kind of a scary question isn’t it? It’s scary because we know that

God is all knowing and all seeing. We know that God sees through our masks and our fake outer appearances and sees our hearts. I can whisper and God hears me anyhow. I can keep my sarcastic and demeaning thoughts to myself, but God knows what I'm thinking. I can keep that hatred for my neighbor or coworker to myself, but God knows my heart. God knows who I am.

We live our lives trying to impress all those around us don't we? We want our employer to think we're dedicated and the best worker he or she has. We want our spouse to think we're the best thing for them, that we're God's gift to women or men. We want our children to think we're the smartest and most qualified parent God ever made. We want our friends and neighbors to see a good person who is an upstanding member of the community. We come to church and we want everyone to think we're perfect, we're a pillar of the church and the community, and we're so good we could probably write a new book of the Bible based on our lives. But we know better don't we?

III – TEXT:

If we truly want to meet and know this Jesus, we have to be honest in our estimates of who we are. We have to remember we're not fooling God at all as this story Jesus told illustrates.

Luke 18:9 - 14 (NLT)

⁹Then Jesus told this story to some who had great self-confidence and scorned everyone else:

¹⁰“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a dishonest tax collector. ¹¹The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, ¹²I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’

¹⁴I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored.”

Luke tells us that Jesus is telling this story to people who thought they were all that. They thought they were perfect and put on airs so that everyone else thought so too. In his story are two people at opposite ends of the spectrum. The Pharisee was the religious leader of the times. They were supposed to live upstanding lives and be an example of obedience to God for everyone to see. The trouble is they had become arrogant and full of pride. It had become more about them and less about God. Then there was the tax collector. The most despised person in Jewish society. They were outcasts and deemed to have given up their rights to be considered a Jew.

Both went to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee stands off by himself and proclaims how great he is, how religious he is. He is obviously a legend in his own mind. He's trying to impress not only the people around who are watching and listening, but evidently thinks he can impress God too. Too bad he only mentions God once at the beginning of his prayer and then it shifts to him.

Then the tax collector stands up. He's too ashamed of what God sees in him to even look towards heaven. He tells God plainly that he is a sinner and asks for mercy. No laundry list of anything good he's done, no words of justification, just "I am a sinner" and asks for God's mercy.

But look at the end of this short story; look at whom God showed mercy too. Jesus said the sinner returned home with forgiveness, not the Pharisee.

IV – I AM A SINNER:

So as you stand here this night are you the Pharisee or the tax collector? Are you trying to impress God and make it to heaven on how good you think you are or are you beating on your chest and admitting to God that you are a sinner in need of his mercy? I hope you are being honest with God, because it's then that you'll find forgiveness.

Any doctor, counselor, or social worker of any kind will tell you the same thing. You can't help someone until they admit they have a problem. It doesn't matter whether it's an illness, an addiction, or some unwanted behavior. Before that person can be put on the road to recovery they must first admit to themselves, and then to others that they have a problem.

The same is true in our relationship to God. He can't help us until we first admit we have a problem. We can't find out who the real Jesus is and what he did for us until we drop our masks and shields and stand before God and admit, "I AM A SINNER!" It's when we admit that Paul was right when he said we have all sinned and fallen short of God's expectations that we begin to understand exactly who Jesus is and what he did for us. It's facing our sinfulness that lets us know how much God loved us.

V – WHO AM I?:

There is a song you will hear and sing as we go through the season of lent. It asked the question this way:

Who am I?
That the Lord of all the earth,
Would care to know my name,
Would care to feel my hurt,

Who am I?
That the Bright and Morning Star,
Would choose to light the way,
For my ever wandering heart,

Who am I?
That the eyes that see my sin,
Would look on me with love,
And watch me rise again,

Who am I?
That the voice that calmed the sea,
Would call out through the rain,
And calm the storm in me,

The answer is simply this; I am a sinner in need of a Savior. A sinner who is relying on the love of a God so strong that he sacrificed his one and only Son so I could beat my chest and cry out for mercy and find that love as the song said:

Not because of who I am,
But because of what You've done,
Not because of what I've done,
But because of who you are,

Thank you Jesus.

AMEN