

Texts: Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:35-49

My wife Robin and I took a trip last summer, north of the border. We ventured into Canada; into British Columbia. We had an enchanting first visit to Victoria. It was our first trip to Canada in about 25 years.

One of the differences that we noticed, between Canada and the USA, happened when we paid for a meal at a restaurant with a credit card. In the US, the server takes your credit card from you, runs the transaction back at the machine, and returns with your card and a paper receipt for you to sign. In Canada, your credit card never leaves your hands. The server brings the machine right over to you. You put your card in it; apply the tip, and get the printout, on the spot, for the transaction. It makes sense to me; the Canadian way. To hold onto the card, not let a stranger walk away with it and do who-knows-what with your personal property. It's becoming more and more risky to trust other persons with your personal information, with those things which hold our personal identity.

When I come back into worship, as we do here at Holy Way, I feel like I get my identity back. My personal sense of who I am is restored. In other settings, activities, groups, I hand some of who I am to others, or to other influences, or dynamics. But it's not the same as here; something gets lost out there. Here, in worship, we receive our true identity, again. It hasn't changed at all from last time, no matter what you or anyone else has done with it. You are God's beloved.

Both our readings this morning speak of identity. The prophet records who he is, as stated by God, pre-birth. "The Lord called me before my birth, called my name when I was in my mother's womb." Before he was, God knew him and named him. Using metaphors of a sharp sword and a piercing arrow, the prophet describes his God-assigned message-proclaiming identity. God told him, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I show my glory." This now takes us beyond personal identity to collective identity. Israel is God's servant, like us, as The Holy Way: "serving with love, sent out at Christ's command" (if I may quote myself). The prophet hands his exiled people back their lost ID, assigned before they were born; unchanged. Not IDed as exiled. **Not** banished. **Not** guilt-ridden. **Not** cut off, not worthless in the eyes of God. You are my servant. Even way outside the borders of the promised land. Distant from the temple walls. Not crossed out for failure to obey the Torah. You are my servant. Here's your ID. And then God, through the prophet adds to Israel, this weakened, depleted, defeated people a new mission, an expanded job description. The people are appointed "as a light to the nations so that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

This people, The Holy Way, reached a turning point about ten years ago, weary after building this new building, paying off mortgages, working to develop a quality music program, enjoying contentment that we'd achieved the status of becoming a real church, I started hearing: "we need to do mission". We sold Café Justo coffee,

connected with the church in Sells and helped repair the church in Santa Rita, drew closer in partnership with the Food Bank at Three Points and the Altar Valley Middle School, and our identity changed. Our mission grew; our call from God expanded, out there. We are servants of the Lord, serving God within and beyond these church walls, making a difference in lives of people in our wider community so that they also may grasp the same ID we hold: you are, we are, beloved children of God. Our ID; restored. Not forgotten. Not disconnected. Not nobodies. Not stuck in whatever else is killing us, dividing us, dehumanizing us. God's beloved. By believing in Jesus Christ, you will have life in his name.

In expanding our mission, as The Holy Way, we've learned, we do not bring the Lord out there. Jesus is already present and active. At Three Points Food Bank, in Dora's ministry. Jesus is alive and well in Sells on the Tohono O'odham reservation. In Agua Prieta, Mexico, at Café Justo, and Café Justo y Mas. The Lord is actively blessing coffee farmers and their families in southern Mexico. My friends, we have a shared, expansive identity. Not Mexican, not Canadian, not native or non-native American: beloved child of God. Greg will tell us shortly about God's children, our brothers and sisters in Kenya.

God incarnate, the Word made flesh, dwelt among us, moved into the neighborhood. Not everyone welcomed him, John reminds us in his prologue, but those who did, who believed, became children of God: this is your ID.

Before the first chapter in the gospel is finished, John tells us about two consecutive days, filled with details: proper names, specific places, a definite time: who these persons were, where they were, how Jesus changed who they were and where they were going. Jesus meets person after person, exactly where each one is.

You don't need to be in the temple; it's here. You don't need to prove that you follow the law; here. You don't need to have a completed belief system. You can be messed up, left out, totally baffled, or at the end of your rope. Jesus enters the here and now, real and potent. John the Baptist saw him: "Look! The Lamb of God!" Two other guys heard this and began to follow this Lamb. Jesus turned toward them, "What are you looking for?" "Rabbi, where are you staying?" How tangible and real, in the moment: "Let's go see." So they went to the place, stayed for a bit, at about 4 in the afternoon, John writes. One of the guys was Andrew, brother of Simon Peter. Andrew gets up, goes and tells his brother, "We've found him, the Messiah." Andrew brings Simon to Jesus. Hear the specific words of identity: Jesus, Lamb, Rabbi, Teacher, Messiah, Christ. Plus: John, Andrew, brother Simon Peter. The transforming, identity-shaping action is talking, walking, movement, and connecting with Jesus (like we do here in worship, in mission). Last note on that day, Jesus says to Simon Peter: "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas, or Peter, (or Rock)."

Next day, more names, more movement, conversation, specific details: Galilee, Philip, Bethsaida, Nathanael, Nazareth, fig tree, and then, by the end of the day, Nathanael

recognizes who this Jesus is: “Rabbi, you are God’s Son. You are the king of Israel.”
IDed. What is more important than identity?

Not only, as we worship, do we find our true identity again. Not only do we discover, as we serve God in unfamiliar places, that others, though different than us, truly are our sisters and brothers in Christ. But we also come to know, as we live by faith in the here and now, in the specifics of name and place and time, this incarnate Lord is with us always; real and potent.

When bad news comes. When things fall apart. When the world shifts, the future turns dismal, everything is up for grabs. To the despised, the rejected, those wearied by the long battle, here’s your ID: “You are my servant, a light to the nations so that God’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth. The Lord will grant us justice; our reward is with our God.” Let’s imagine we’re in Canada: never let go of that.