

Affirmation Leading to Identity:

1 John 3:1-3
John 15:1-15

We continue our series on 'Discipleship' as we explore what it means for us to grow together. We are on week three, but if you've missed any of the other weeks and would like to catch up, or relook at what was said, the sermons are all on the website, or if you receive the e-notices, you just need to click on the relevant button and it will take you straight to the sermon text. It's been good that all those preaching have been willing to have their sermons published - and for that we thank each of them and their willingness to be vulnerable.

We've looked at the term 'disciple' and recognised that discipleship is about us becoming more 'Christ-like'. We've focussed on intimacy leading to affirmation and in the sermon I preached, I shared that as we become more intimate with God it leads to us being affirmed. Isn't that word 'intimate' a beautiful word that speaks of the depth and closeness of relationship that God longs to have with each one of us. When Jesus was baptised, God said: "This is my beloved, with whom I am pleased". God says that to us too, but we need to be in a place where we can hear it and accept it. As we grow in God's affirmation - or rather as we allow it to grow in us, this affirmation leads to a growing sense of identity - knowing who we are.

Identity is crucial for all of us - knowing who we are. It's something that all teenagers struggle with as they grow up, it's something that people struggle with as they go through life-changing times - asking the question "who am I?"

It has been said that some of the issues within society today are down to us not knowing who we are as a nation - Governments have tried to address this through the education system and now all children and young people from preschool to the end of secondary school must study a curriculum entitled 'British Values' which explore the identity of the nation... what makes Britain... Britain.

But perhaps some of the issue we have is that our identity is so often wrapped up in what we do. A parent, a grandparent, an employee... and it's when one of these things change: a child leaves home, we retire or are made redundant, that our identity is rocked. It can feel as though our identity changes, that we don't know who we are - because our identity is wrapped up in what we do rather than who we are - or rather whose we are.

By accepting and hearing God's affirmation, it leads us to a greater knowledge and acceptance of who we are. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!"

That's where our identity lies - in God as our Father who has chosen us and calls us his sons and daughters. There's that beautiful phrase in John 15: "I no longer call you servants because a master does not confide in his servants." God longs for a much closer relationship.

To accept our identity - as children of God, we need to accept that God is Father - a loving Father who generously showers gifts on his children and God's love helps us to grasp that reality that God is Father and not just our judge.
Dare we call ourselves God's children today?

Discipleship is about us becoming more Christ-like, allowing the Spirit to transform us. We are like Jesus because we too are children of God - the family likeness that people should be able to see in and through us.

We are children of God and can call him Father - that Father loves us as much as he loves Jesus.... It's this identity that is the basis of our confidence to ask God for things in prayer. It's that identity as a child of God that also brings with it rights and responsibilities.

We are, and always will be, a child of God - and he never regrets bringing us into his family.

Knowing our identity and being secure in our identity means that when crises in life occur, as they do, our identity is not shaken, but remains strong in Christ.

Also, the other thing that has really struck me in this series on discipleship is that discipleship is a little like being a musician. For an accomplished musician, it's not simply about knowing the technical aspects of how to play the instrument, but it's about feeling the music, reaching deep into every part of the body. And as they feel that music and as they allow the music to become part of them, they focus less on the technical and more on how they become a channel of communication for the music. We're learning a lot about the 'technicalities' of discipleship over these seven weeks, but if we are going to grow as disciples - individually and corporately- we need to allow the Spirit to transform us, allowing us to be channels of God's love and grace.