

Be Who You Are
June 20, 2014
Caldwell Presbyterian Church
Rev. John Cleghorn
Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

You have been on the receiving end of a lot of words from me in the last seven days, as our denomination's General Assembly has been making big decisions. So this morning, I hope to give some other voices some air time. One of those voices is that of the Rev. Chris Carrasco of our sister church, Mulberry Presbyterian.

As with Caldwell, her church is experiencing rebirth. Chris has wanted to visit Caldwell for a while. But that's tough when you work Sundays. Today she has just gotten off a plane from Detroit, where she served as a commissioner at General Assembly. What a blessing that she wanted to be here today. I also want to engage you in the conversation this morning, so stand by for that.

Throughout last week, I kept searching for what scripture might speak to us today. It came to me about 2 a.m. Wednesday morning. We are, as Linda read, to be salt and light, in all things, at all times.

This passage, familiar to many, comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. In a nutshell, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' marching orders for the Christian life. But before Jesus gets very far in telling his followers "what" they are to do, he reminds them "who" they are.

So much of our Christian journey – and our journey in all of life – has to do with our identity. Who are we? How are we made? How are we set apart and for what specific roles and responsibilities?

These questions apply to us as individuals and in our personal walk with our Creator. They also apply to us as God's people, the church, a family of disciples. That was what was on Jesus' mind when he gave the "Great Speech," known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Much has been added to what Jesus did and didn't actually say. But scholars generally agree that these words trace to the historical Jesus.

In two words, Jesus spoke volumes. Who are we? We are salt and light.

Salt stood for many things in those days. It was used in sacrifice. It represented loyalty, covenant and fidelity. "Sharing salt" meant sharing a meal in meaningful relationship. In

another meaning, salt purified, seasoned and preserved food, enriching what gives life.

As for light, Jesus was telling the disciples they were to reflect God's love and purposes, they were to illumine the world, to stand against darkness, boldly visible in how they demonstrated God's love and to not grow dim.

With both of these metaphors, Jesus was saying to his followers -- and to us -- "be who you are." Who we are, our identity, is a gift from God. We are continuously formed and shaped by God's hand, just as salt and light draw their unique and needed qualities from a source outside of themselves. Their purpose stands apart from all others, just as Jesus' followers were to stand apart.

All that goes for you and for me. We are called to be who we are, as God made us. This week, that has new and broader meaning. We at Caldwell enjoy the gift of a diverse family that welcomes any who might walk with us, whoever they are, whatever they are, as God made them.

Now the Presbyterian Church USA issues an equally open invitation. At a national level, we are now a different church, truly open and affirming of all of God's children -- gay and straight, rich and poor, churched and unchurched, of every race and color and background - a church that no longer withholds a blessing, specifically the blessing of marriage, from any couple who love each other and want to give themselves both to each other and to God.

As a denomination, it's been almost 50 years getting here. Yet more work lies ahead for us in North Carolina, where state law stands in the way of same-gender marriage. But I believe that hurdle will not stand long.

Today, we are called to renew our faith and sense of identity. Faith and identity, as I wrote in my blog Friday, go hand in hand. That day on the mount, Jesus' main concern was that his followers would forget their identity, their saltiness and their lightness, that they would -- consciously or otherwise -- fall short of being who they were to be and fail to fulfill their function in the world as the hands and feet of Christ.

Now our church can be more fully itself, and each of us can be more fully ourselves, as God made us, walking as Christ commands.

Now we can live more fully, not for ourselves but for others.

Now, as salt, we can represent in the world God's call to fidelity, loyalty and covenant,

including any union God has sewn together.

Now, as light, with new hope, we can push back the darkness of hate, bigotry and inequality of ANY kind against ANY of God's children, being fully who we are, seeking to illuminate every life and every relationship, every neighborhood and every need that God gives into our keeping.

Thanks be to God. Amen.