

**Knowing Who We Are**  
Proverbs 3:5-8; John 3:22-30

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Deacon Ordination and Installation  
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I remember going into a seminary class once and the professor asking us to answer this question: Who are you? Sounds easy enough, right? My inclination today would be to say, “I am David Freeman, husband to a wonderful woman, father to three great children, and pastor of a church I love dearly.” Those three roles—husband, father, and pastor—basically define who I am. But the professor who presented this question asked that we not to use family or profession to answer it. So I couldn’t say that I am a husband, father and pastor. Suddenly what looked like a pretty simple question became quite difficult to answer.

Who are you? Deeper than what you do. Deeper than how people perceive you. Down at the core of your being, who are you? The life well lived is about answering that question at that level, having a clear sense of who we are. That then informs what kind of family person we are and what kind of profession we choose and how we perform it.

I’ve always considered the biblical character John the Baptist to be a rather odd fellow. He lived in the wilderness, remember? He wore camel hair, long before camel hair became fashionable, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was such an eccentric that his beliefs got him beheaded. Whatever else we might say about John the Baptist, I think we can say this: he knew who he was.

The text from John 3 is a good example. After John baptized Jesus, Jesus began baptizing his own followers. So John and Jesus both were baptizing, each gaining a following. To put it into today’s terms, two teachers were competing for the same market. Then one day John’s followers noticed that the people had quit coming to John for baptism and had started going instead to Jesus. They reported this to John, and this is where we see the real John the Baptist. I sense anxiety in the words of his followers as they break this bad news to John: “...[Jesus] is here baptizing, and *all* are going to him.”

Everybody is going to Jesus. The implied message goes something like this: “John, we’re losing. Everyone is going to Jesus. What are we going to do?”

John’s response to their anxiety shows a centered, non-anxious leader. He reminded them of who he was. “I am not the Messiah,” he said. Remember, I told you that before. I was sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare his way. He used this wedding analogy to explain himself. He said that Jesus was the groom, the centerpiece of God’s plan. And all the people they had been baptizing, the world, collectively they were the bride. Jesus was the groom, and the people were his bride. Then who was John? John said that he was a friend of the groom, kind of like the best man. The best man wasn’t jealous when his best friend got married. No, the best man rejoiced. And so when they brought this report to John he said, “My joy has been fulfilled.” Then he said this, seven words that tell us an awful lot about John the Baptist: “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

John knew who he was. He wasn’t defined by his insecurity or his fear or his ambition. He was defined by his belief in God and the work God called him to do.

So who are you, Nan Desnon and Barbara White? Who are you? If we do not deliberately answer that question, the world will answer it for us. The world will tell us who we are. It will say that you don’t measure up if you don’t wear certain clothes, if you don’t drive a certain kind of car, and don’t eat at certain restaurants. It will cause you to think that there is something wrong with you if you don’t hang out with a certain group of people and live in a certain neighborhood. If we allow the world to define us, we will end up like a pinball, knocked from one place to the next and to the next. Until one day when we say “stop” and begin the journey of defining for ourselves who we are.

When that day comes for you, don’t forget that odd man named John the Baptist, the one who said, “He must increase, and I must decrease.” He was defined by his belief in God and the work God called him to do. That’s not bad for all followers of Jesus.

Today we ordain two women who have been on a journey of defining who they are. Today they add a new word to that definition: deacon.