

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

September 13, 2015  
*“Who Are You?”*



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## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

September 13, 2015

*“Who Are You?”*

Rev. Bill Freeman

**Psalm 19:1-5**

*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.*

**Mark 8:27-30**

*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

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*Who Are You?*

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Eve was upset when Adam came home late one night. Eve said, “You’re running around with other women!” Adam said, “You’re the only woman on earth.” They quarreled until they went to sleep. In the middle of the night Adam was awakened when Eve started poking him in the chest. Adam said, “What are you doing?” Eve said, “Counting your ribs.” Apparently Eve was, in part, a jealous woman, that’s who she was.

Who are you? Some of us spend a lifetime trying to figure out who we are. Maybe who you are is defined by family relationships. You're a grandparent or a parent, a child or an orphan. Is that who you are, or at least part of who you are? Maybe who you are is defined by what's particular about you. You're male or female, tall or short, left-handed or right-handed, fat or thin. Is that who you are, or at least part of who you are? Maybe who you are is defined by what you do for a living. You're a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker. Is that who you are, or at least part of who you are? Then who are you when you retire? How you make a living isn't who you are. Who you are is how you make a life.

How can you know who you are, how you're perceived by others? You could ask your family. (Although that could be scary.) You could ask your co-workers. (Although, again, that could be scary.) You could ask your friends and fellow churchgoers. (Hopefully they know you best and would be honest, and gentle, with you.)

It's good to know who you are. What your strengths are. What your weaknesses are. Maybe you can discover who you are in your relationship with other people. Maybe you can discover who you are in your relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Some theologians say God knows who God is because of God's relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and humankind. Some say that's why God created humankind, to have a relationship with humankind. So, who is God?

The Bible tells us who God is. The Psalmist says, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." So, when you see a spectacular sunset, imagine that in the corner of the scene, God has written God's name, the way artists do. Jesus says, "God is spirit," and 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love." So, we can think of God as a spirit of love. God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." So,

since those are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, God is the beginning and end of everything.

Philosophers, theologians, and writers tell us who God is. Aristotle says God is, “The Unmoved Mover.” So, God is the one who set everything in motion, and now God is letting the universe run its course. Paul Tillich says God is, “The Ground Of Being.” So, God is a part of everything that happens. Robert Browning says, “God is the perfect poet.” So, God is the one who makes a flock of geese flying in formation overhead look like poetry in motion.

Hymns tell us who God is. One hymn says, “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise.” So, God is intelligence at work forever, even though we can’t see God. Another hymn says, “O God, Our Help In Ages Past.” So, God is the one who helped us before, and we believe God will help us again. Still another hymn says, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” So, God is the one who will protect us from harm.

Who do you say God is? Because we’re a United Church of Christ church, nobody tells you who you have to say God is or judges you for who you say God is. Some people say God is the great “I am,” while others say God is all that is seen and unseen, or God is creative energy or God is life or God is peace. Our church knows you can decide for yourself who God is. Whoever you say God is, I hope you have a personal relationship with God. Now, who is Jesus?

The Bible tells us who Jesus is. Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Jesus then asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” So, Jesus is the one about whom the prophets foretold. Jesus is called, “Son of God,” and, “Lord and Savior.” So, Jesus is referred to by the names that are

supposed to apply only to Caesar: Son of God and Lord and Savior. Jesus is called, “The Good Shepherd.” So, Jesus watches over his flock.

Preachers, theologians, and writers tell us who Jesus is. Martin Luther King, Jr., says, “Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness.” And, God knows the world needs more extremists like Jesus. Martin Buber says, “From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother.” (It’s too bad more people don’t see Jesus that way.) Reza Aslan says, “The key to recognizing who Jesus was is to recognize this fundamental truth: He was a Jew.” And that’s often difficult for some Christians to wrap their minds around.

Hymns tell us who Jesus is. One hymn says, “What a friend we have in Jesus.” So, Jesus isn’t some high in the sky deity, he’s our friend. Another hymn says, “Jesus Our Brother, Kind And Good.” So, again, Jesus isn’t estranged from us, he’s our brother. Still another hymn says, “Jesus Loves The Little Children.” So, Jesus would make the ideal Sunday School Teacher.

Who do you say Jesus is? Because we’re a United Church of Christ church, nobody tells you who you have to say Jesus is or judges you for who you say Jesus is. Some people say Jesus is their Redeemer, while others say Jesus is their Spiritual Sibling. Some people say Jesus is someone to worship, while others say Jesus is someone to follow when he teaches us to “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Our church knows you can decide for yourself who Jesus is. Whoever you say Jesus is, I hope you have a personal relationship with Jesus. Now, who is the Holy Spirit?

The Bible tells us who the Holy Spirit is. After he was baptized, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” So, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus, and I believe the Holy Spirit leads us, too. On Pentecost,

the disciples, “were filled with the Holy Spirit.” So, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, and I believe the Holy Spirit fills us, too. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And they’ll know we are Christians by our fruit.

Mystics, theologians, and the Pope tell us who the Holy Spirit is. Henri Nouwen says the Holy Spirit, “creates in us a sacred space.” So, we all need to prepare a room inside of us for the Holy Spirit. N.T. Wright says, “Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God’s new Temple.” So, if we have the Holy Spirit within us, we are each a house of God. Pope Francis says the Holy Spirit, “pushes the Church to go forward.” So, the Holy Spirit is forward-thinking, one might even say, progressive.

Hymns tell us who the Holy Spirit is. One hymn says, “Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling.” And it is ever dwelling: in the world, in the church, and in us. Another hymn says, “Holy Spirit, Truth Divine.” So, the Holy Spirit is God’s truth, which hopefully we hear and heed. Still another hymn says, “Come, Share the Spirit.” And the Spirit can be shared, because there’s a never-ending supply of the Holy Spirit, it’s an unlimited supernatural resource.

Who do you say the Holy Spirit is? Because we’re a United Church of Christ church, nobody tells you who you have to say the Holy Spirit is or judges you for who you say the Holy Spirit is. The word for spirit in the Bible means “breath” and “wind.” So, some people say the Holy Spirit is the air that they breathe, while others say the Holy Spirit is the wind upon their face. Some people say the Holy Spirit is within them, while others say the Holy Spirit is all around them. Our church knows you can decide for yourself who the Holy Spirit is. Whoever you say the Holy Spirit is, I hope you have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Now, let’s get back to the question: Who are you?

The Who had a hit song years ago. “*Who Are You?*” The Who sings, “Who are you? (Who, who, who, who?) I really wanna know.” So, who are you?

Because we’re a United Church of Christ church, nobody tells you who you are or judges you for who you are. The Book of Genesis tells us, God created you in God’s image. And God blessed you. Some people say you and all of humankind are sinners, in need of forgiveness by God, while others say you and all of humankind are children of God, loved unconditionally by God. Our church knows you can decide for yourself who you are. Whoever you say you are, I hope you have a personal relationship with yourself.

Because I’m a minister in the United Church of Christ, I’m allowed to suggest to you who you are. I believe: You are a spirit, a soul, a spark of God. Created by God. Made in the image of God. A child of God. Blessed by God. Loved by God. Designed by God to be whole and holy. You are goodness. You are kindness. You are love. You are the syrup on the pancake of life. You are the butter on the biscuit of life. You are the cherry on the hot fudge sundae of life. God looks at you and says: My, oh, my, see what I made! God looks at you and says: Wow! I’ve outdone myself this time! God looks at you and says: Perfect! I wouldn’t change a thing! That’s who you are. That’s who you are.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to see who we are.  
Help us to see who people think we are.  
And help us to see who you know we are.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*  
Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*  
Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*  
Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*  
Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*  
Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*  
Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*  
Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*  
Humanism