

Sermon  
January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023  
The Naming of Jesus  
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa  
The Reverend Victoria Scott  
Readings: NUMBERS 6:22-27; PSALM 8; GALATIANS 4:4-7 OR  
PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; LUKE 2:15-21

Here I am. Here you are. Here we are together.  
Who am I? Who are you? Who are we together?

These are Brian McLaren's words from his book *Naked Spirituality*. A prayer. An invocation.

When my children, Annabel and Evan, were toddlers we used to sing a song with them. It started "Hello, my name is Annabel..." or "Hello, my name is Evan...". It went on to "my Mummy's name is Victoria...", "my Daddy's name is Randy..." "my brother's name is Evan..." and we carried on through the whole family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. It was quite a long song! 😊

When we did this, we were living into Brian McLaren's words: we were saying "Here I am, here you are, here we are together." We were situating Annabel and Evan within a framework that could hold them and support them as they got to know themselves.

I had a professor at St. Paul who talked about the stories we live into and move through in our human development. We start with the story of "ME" – here I am – then we move into a story of "WE" – when we say "here you are". This story of "we" – looking and relating to others – helps us to get to know ourselves better.

We can't stop there, though: we need to move into "THE" story. "THE" story begins when we acknowledge "Here we are together." When we see that everyone and everything is connected.

For us, as Christians, "THE" story begins with God saying "Here I am". Here I am, flesh and blood like you. Here I am, a tiny vulnerable baby. God said "Here you are." God said "Here you are" and asked us "Will you take

hold of me, and my love, as you would hold a tiny, vulnerable baby?” When God came to be with us in Jesus, God said “Here we are together”.

Luke’s Gospel brings us a story of Mary and Joseph, of angels and shepherds. It is a story of “Here I am. Here you are. Here we are together”.

The shepherds make their way to Bethlehem. They see the baby in the manger, and they say: Here I am. They say to Jesus: Here you are. They say to Jesus, and to one another: Here we are together.

Names are an important part of “THE” story: it’s how we say to one another “Here I am, here you are, here we are together.”

Underneath all the categories – names, titles, labels – we use to describe ourselves, though, there is a fundamental unity and identity to all life.

Brian McLaren’s invocation doesn’t stop with “Here I am, here you are, here we are together.” It continues on to “*Who am I? Who are you? Who are we together?*”. This goes deeper than any name, or title, or label, and so does “THE” story that we are invited into as Christians, as followers of Jesus.

Richard Rohr finds the answer to “Who am I?” and “Who are you?” in what he describes as a “divine spark”. That divine spark is at the heart – it’s the starting point – of everyone and everything. Everyone and everything is connected, and belongs.

“Who am I?” “Who are you?” “Who are we together?” recognizes the divine spark and expresses the deep connections that are everywhere.

This is at the heart of the Christian story, at the heart of the invitation to fullest, truest living found in embracing “THE” story of Jesus.

We hear that Mary treasured the words of the shepherds and pondered them in her heart. What was she thinking? Was she thinking about the words of the angel Gabriel, foretelling Jesus’ birth? Was she connecting those words with the words of the shepherds? I imagine she was. She must have had so many thoughts and feelings! She didn’t react, though, she held all the thoughts and feelings and pondered them in her heart. Mary’s pondering is a reminder for us of the opportunity we all have to pause, and to ponder.

The name Jesus – transliterated from Hebrew and Aramaic as *Jeshua* – is a combination of an abbreviation of “Yahweh”, the Hebrew name of Israel’s God, and the verb *yasha*, meaning “rescue”, “deliver” or “save”. *Jeshua* became *Iēsous* in Greek, and then Jesus. The name Jesus, then, means “God saves”.

One of the things that Jesus saves us from – one of the things that “THE” story of Christianity invites us out of – is dualistic thinking that denies connection.

When we are willing to ponder “Who am I”, and we believe that our starting point is a “divine spark”, that we are loveable and loved we are saved, freed from having to save or prove ourselves. When we are willing to pause ponder “Who are you?” and see that “divine spark” in everyone and everything, we are saved, freed, from having to judge, freed from our egos, freed from “us-and-them”. When we pause and ponder “Who are we together”, we begin to love people in an entirely new and freeing way. The categories are not as important as the connections that hold everything together.

God came to us in Jesus to show who God is. Jesus shows us that God is love, and compassion, and peace and justice, and that we are, in the deepest part of our being, that same love.

God asks us “Who are we together?” and Jesus shows us that together we are bringers of love, and compassion and justice.

May we remember to pause and ponder as Mary did. May we know that who God is and who we are is love. May we know that together we are made for love, and connection, and may we live that love and connection today and all our days, in Jesus name. Amen.