

“Hello, My Name Is...”

Hello.

Allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Jon-Erik St. Clair Misz. My friends and family call me J.E. You can call me J.E. I am a native Hoosier. The son of 4 devoted parents. Five feet and six inches tall. A Christian. The husband of Katie. A pastor's husband and member here at Waterford Mennonite Church. A graduate and fan of Duke University. A mental health therapist. An extrovert. A poet. My social security number is 630 82... just kidding. I'm not giving that out, but I just wanted to see if you were paying attention.

But I could keep going, listing dozens of ways to describe who I am and what my identity is in this world.

And frankly, we have never had more access into discovering who we are.

Popularity has surged of consumer DNA testing companies like Ancestry.com and 23 and Me. In the next three years, consumer DNA testing is projected to be an over \$300 million industry annually with already over 10 million people having taken these DNA tests. You may have seen some of these commercials with a guy who thought he was German all growing up and then took this DNA test to discover he has 51% Scottish DNA and so now he is free to wear kilts all the time.

For some Mennonites, we will carry our last names as a story of who we are and what defines us.

Another way to understand our identity I recently discovered through a good friend. And he has become obsessed with the Enneagram. Has anyone here heard or done some work with the Enneagram? Actually, Katie and I discovered just this past week that we were both in separate rooms unbeknownst to one another taking an Enneagram test at the same time. I jumped on that bandwagon only recently, kind of pushing it off until I felt like it, cuz I'm a total 9 like that. Only you Enneagram nerds get that.

But the Enneagram is a type of personality test that stems back many centuries and identifies 9 different personality types. It's experienced a sort of resurgence in recent years, particularly as a form of spiritual self-discovery touted by the likes of Richard Rohr.

There are so many ways in which we try to learn more about ourselves. You can even take tests online to learn which type of sandwich you are... I'm grilled cheese, by the way. A

misfortune for my poor gluten-free and dairy-free wife.

And with all these ways accessible to discover who we are, it's easy to get lost in what's real and what's not.

Henri Nouwen (in *Who Are We? Reclaiming our Christian Identity*), lists five lies that people often believe about their own identity:

- 1) I am what I have.
- 2) I am what I do.
- 3) I am what other people say or think of me.
- 4) I am nothing more than my worst moment.
- 5) I am nothing less than my best moment.

And one added by another theologian, who says, "I am what I am and dat's all what I am." That's Popeye the Sailor Man. Toot Toot.

Because with all these lies that are so easy to believe, it can be so confusing to know where to turn to understand our identity, I wanted to turn to the stories of scripture to discover what we may be able to learn about who we are. Along with listening to Felix, Sam and Miranda share a compilation of what scripture says about our identity, I've gathered three poems I've written addressing identity.

As I shared these poems, I recognize that some of you may have never been to a poetry show before, so let me help you out. If you like what you hear, feel free to snap. Since we're in church, you can also give a little "Amen" or Mmmhmm". At the end of the poem, feel free to give a sign language sign for clapping. If you don't like what you hear, it'll be over soon. You can handle it.

This first poem is about our identity in the context of the whole creation narrative. It takes the perspective of God in Genesis 1. What I love about Genesis 1 is that it's actually written as a form of Hebrew poetry, and I think that poetry is one of the only ways that we can understand creation. This poem is called, "Creation to Conversation".

### **"Creation to Conversation" poem**

This next story comes from my time working as a middle school youth pastor. I had taken the youth on a service trip in Indianapolis. We began our mornings on this trip with a devotional time. Towards the end of the devotional one morning, I had an 8<sup>th</sup> student run up to me holding the Bible open. She pointed to Psalm 139 and asked, "Did you know this was in here?" Well... yes. She had highlighted the words, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." This was a revelation for her, as it is for many of us when we discover or re-discover that we are cherished and known. This poem is about her discovery of this and how it changed her world.

### **“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” poem**

This final poem is about my experience. I grew up, and I use that term loosely, as the shortest kid in my class. I was so excited when I got to 8<sup>th</sup> grade as I was no longer the shortest kid in my middle school... because my younger sister, who is shorter than me, started attending my school. For much of my life, I perceived this as something that was wrong with me or a deficit in some way. And this is often the case that many of us believe that the ways in which we are not accepted or unremarkable are deficits or problems. This is “My Short Poem.”

### **“My Short Poem” poem**

In closing, I’ve learned that our message this morning isn’t a call to go and discover who you are. I’m all about self-discovery, I mean, I am a therapist. But this morning’s calling is more primal than asking you to search for who you are. This morning, I’m asking that you remember who you are. That you are created as beloved and valued, that you are known and cherished, and that you as you are is more than enough.

For many of our families and teachers, school is starting up this week or in the coming weeks. You will likely be meeting new people and forming new relationships. And as you introduce yourself, maybe take a moment from listing all the typical ways we describe who we are and remind yourself, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

*For copies of the poems used in this sermon, you can find them on JE’s blog, [www.jemisz.wordpress.com](http://www.jemisz.wordpress.com). Also, you can find JE at church and ask for a copy of his poetry collection **And We Walk** featuring these and many other poems on faith, hope and love. It is available for donation.*