

10<sup>th</sup> January, 2016

Text: Isaiah 43:1

Theme: "Knowing WHOSE you are"

Can I ask you: what's your greatest need? As a person? I'm sure you've got lots, but - out of them all – what stands at the top of the list? What is that you need above all to be a secure, fulfilled, fully-functioning human being?

That's a question that has engaged the brightest of minds over many, many decades. Heaps of rigorous research has been done and findings published. Abraham Maslow – and American Psychologist – is perhaps the best-known researcher in this field. In 1943 he published something many of you would have heard of – Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It's a triangle, and on the bottom level is our most basic needs. It's physiological needs – stuff to keep your body alive – breathing, food, water, sleep, stuff like that. And as you go up the triangle, you get bigger needs, deeper needs. Until you get to the top of the triangle. Self-actualisation. It's being very aware of, it's knowing WHO you are. And that – according to Maslow – is our greatest need.

Do you know WHO you are? At your deepest level? Are you clear about that? I suspect a lot of people aren't. Let me give you an example. When I went as the pastor to Victor Harbor Lutheran church, I was looking forward to getting to know the 100 or so residents in our retirement village. But what I wasn't prepared for was how many of those residents – especially the males – seemed to be, well, "lost". And I reckon – on reflection – that it was to do with this whole "WHO are you?" question. See, when they were working, they defined who they were by what their job was. "Who are you?" "I'm a banker". Or "I'm an engineer" or "I'm a public servant". But that's not WHO they were! That's just a function they performed, a role they played. And when that role or function ceased – when they retired – they were lost. Because that's the only way they had defined themselves.

And it's not just a struggle that retirees have – to know who they are. I reckon most people – most of us define who we are – in part at least – according to what role we play in life. I'm a mother. I'm a wife, a husband. I'm a student. I'm a healthy, active human being. But what happens when that role changes – when the last child leaves the home? When a marriage splits? When my body starts to creak and groan? Many people struggle with that because they think that they have lost something of who they are. They feel that somehow they are lesser people because the essence of them has diminished.

Do you know WHO you are? I think Maslow is onto something here. It is a deep, fundamental need. But it's not our greatest need. To find out that greatest need, you need to go beyond the best insights that human minds have discovered. And you need to go to the source of ultimate wisdom. You need to go to God. You need to go to the question he asks. Not: Do you know WHO you are?, but: Do you know WHOSE you are? That's THE question! That deals with your greatest need. And unless you know the answer to that question, you really will struggle through life.

So, do you know WHOSE you are? Well, if you not too sure on this, I'd suggest you go to the Bible. Because that's what this whole book is about. It's about God declaring and reminding and reaffirming again and again WHOSE people are. WHOSE the Israelites are. WHOSE the New Testament church are. WHOSE the people in Prince of Peace are! WHOSE you are. That's what this book declares over and over again. And this morning we're going to look at just one verse in this whole book. Because it shouts out – perhaps clearer than any other verse in the whole bible – just WHOSE you are.

So let's read it. *"But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. 'O Israel, the one who formed you says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine'." Is 43:1*

WHOSE are you? *"You are mine"*, God declares.

Just 3 words! Simple words! 3 letters, 3 letters and 4 letters! 1 syllable for each! But encased in these simple words is one of the most precious and deepest and life-transforming truths of all time. *"You are mine!"*

Do you struggle at times to find your place in life? Where you belong? Where you fit? Whether you count for anything? Do you sometimes feel as though you are the "third wheel", on the outer, that you wouldn't be missed if you weren't around? That might be your reality. And if it is, life must be tough for you. But into your life God speaks his reality. *"You are mine."* "You have a place with me! You belong to me! You fit into my universe! You count for everything to me!"

*"You are mine"*, declares who? The Almighty God! The Creator of the heavens and the earth! The One who was and is and who is to come! The Alpha and the Omega. The one who all people of all time will one day bow down before! That's who! And this God – this eternal, all powerful, all knowing God – he stands before you today. And he looks you in the eyes and he says; *"you are mine"*. "Don't ever forget that! Others may not value you or include you. But I do. And I always will. You are – and always will be – mine."

*"You are mine."* And this amazing verse from Isaiah goes on to give 4 reasons why that's true.

Firstly, he says: I *"created you"*.

Do you hear that? You are no accident. You are not here by some random chance. The Creator of the heavens and the earth also decided to create you. Because he has a plan for you. A place for you. A purpose for you.

I *"formed you"*, God goes on to say. And our minds go straight to that precious verse from the Psalms; *"You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb."* Ps 139:13.

It's a beautiful picture, isn't it, of the Creator God lovingly forming us, fashioning us. You are not the result of some slap-dash, throw-it-together and whatever will be will be process. Over the time in your mother's womb, God fashioned you and shaped you and formed you just the way he wanted you to be. And not just your physical features, but also your *"inmost being"* – your temperament and your personality, the way you perceive things and go about things, your core, your essence. All woven together in one integrated, coordinated fully-functioning package called you!

*"I have ransomed you."* That's the 3<sup>rd</sup> point that the text makes. *"Ransomed"*. You know what that means, don't you. It means "to buy back". And it points to that cataclysmic time in human history where sin entered the world, where the creation turned their back on the Creator, where man and woman decided they knew better than God. And at that moment, things changed. Relationships changed. Dramatically, devastatingly changed. *"You are mine"* was no longer true. It was replaced with "You are no longer mine".

And that ripped at the Creator's heart. That his creation – whom he had lovingly formed and given them everything – paradise – had turned their backs on him. But instead of abandoning them, he set in motion a plan to ransom them, to redeem them, to buy them back. But, oh the cost. It would cost him the life of his only Son.

And that's not just Adam and Eve's story. It's ours too. Because we have sinned. And we continue to sin. We think we know better than the Creator. And so we go our way, according to our plans. And God watches. And his heart breaks. But willingly, lovingly he gave his all so that we could be ransomed. Restored. His once more.

And so to the 4<sup>th</sup> truth the text brings; I have *"called you by name."*

Names. Names are important, aren't they. They identify us. They personalise us. They distinguish us from the crowd.

Names. Do you struggle with names? Remembering other people's names? Do other people remember you name? Or do you feel that – to others – you're pretty much a nobody?

Well to God, you are not a nobody. You are not even a somebody. You are an individual to whom he has given a name. When he sees you, he doesn't scratch his head wondering, "now, who is that?" When he wants to talk to you, he doesn't begin "now, you over there, . . ." No, he knows you. He's in relationship with you. As friends from wayback. And so he calls you by name.

Your greatest need – to know WHOSE you are. Well, God has spelt that out for you today in crystal clear terms. Whose are you? He says; *"You are MINE!"* Because he "created" you! And because he "formed" you! And because he "ransomed" you! And because he "calls you by name"!

And knowing that – WHOSE you are – knowing that means that you are set free to live life courageously and confidently. You *"do not need to be afraid"*, Isaiah says. Because nothing that life throws at you - no circumstances that confront you, no pitfalls that encompass you; no tragedies that befall you – will be able to change this incredible fact. *"You are mine"*. And he is yours!