

My first parish appointment was a little over 13 years ago in a small town in the South West of Australia.

I think I was about 6 weeks into my ministry there - when I met the local policeman for the first time.

It was my day off and I had a late night the evening before, staying up late talking with a couple of friends who had brought over a lovely bottle of Benedictine liquor.

The next morning I decided to have a little sleep in and left the 4 kids to their own devices whilst I enjoyed a little more snooze time.

At around 8am I emerged and my youngest son came running to me crying and saying he was dizzy.

He was about 8 years old. He kept crying and was appeared very disorientated saying he had a really bad headache and was feeling sick.

I was really frightened and a whole range of scenarios went through my head - perhaps he had a brain tumour or meningitis?

Something was clearly very wrong.

As I cradled him and calmed him and myself down, I detected the smell of alcohol!

My son had drunk the glass of port I had poured out for myself the evening before, just before my friends dropped in for a surprise visit.

I later discovered that he not only polished off the glass of port, but also enjoyed it **so much** that he refilled the glass - possibly more than once!

When I had realized what had happened, my tenderness evaporated and he sensed he might be in trouble.

He began yelling and screaming and he ran out of the front door onto the busy road.

I went straight after him and grabbed his arm but he refused to return to the house.

I said that it was dangerous for him to be running around near the traffic -especially whilst being drunk but he would not return home.

He then threatened me and said he would go to the police station because I wouldn't let him go.

So we marched the 2 or so blocks to the police station.

I thought that once we started in that direction I would have called his bluff and he would back out but he didn't.

I wasn't particularly concerned because there is usually no one at the police station that early in the morning anyway, being a small town -it is never usually manned before 10am...but guess what?

.....Yep.. a big burly, handsome policeman came out  
....and I introduced myself...

.....Hi my name is Karen Urquhart.

.....I am the new vicar in town.

.....This is my son.

.....He is 8 years old and he is drunk!

... he soon sobered up... and news of my appointment spread throughout the town!

Then after being here in Canada for a few weeks, again about 6 weeks into my new appointment-just like in that town, I walked home after a long day at the parish

It was raining quite heavy, so decided to enter my house by the front door rather than the rear.

I didn't realize that by doing this the security alarm would be activated.

The piercing sound persisted until I stumbled to the key pad to punch in my code.

About 3 minutes later the phone rang - it was the security company enquiring about the alarm.

I explained that I went through a different door. The man asked who I was and I told him, then asked me for the password.

Every password I could think of wasn't the one.

They still had the landlords old password and thus they were unable to ascertain if **I was who I said I was.**

The man said they would call the landlord.

I made a couple of calls to sort it out and within another 5 minutes a very good looking RCMP man was at my door asking me **who I was!**.

I had to explain again and he took down all my details...

....A pattern here: meeting the police in unusual circumstances! ... and I recalled my first police encounter with police in Denmark with a chuckle...

but as I closed the door and sat down, the words "who are you?" jumped out at me...

...the same question directed at John the Baptizer... "who are you?"... three simple words that when strung together form one of the most profound phrases possible- just oozing with mystery and potential...

Who am I?

How do we identify ourselves?

Back where I lived in the SW corner of Australia, the aboriginal people, the Noongars, greet a new person by asking - .... "Where are you from and who's your mob?"

Land and family are the 2 prime factors for these people.

It is hard to make a connection with an aboriginal person if you don't show an interest in their family -and community origins and share something of your own.

Often when we introduce ourselves we are identified with our job or role, sometimes where we live or who we are related to.

Think about when you are in a new group and you are asked to introduce yourself...

It might go something like this....

.... Hi my name is Jane smith.

....I am a nurse at the local hospital and have been there for 8 years.

....I have 2 children and have been married to Mike for 8 years. I like cooking and yoga.

But Jane Smith is much more than her title and what she does.

If we think of identity in these terms, we can limit ourselves in many ways.

Imagine how it is for a person living on the streets...

... Hi my name is Jim. I have no family, I don't have any work or place to live.

This limitation becomes very apparent to me when I encounter a new person. In my last parish in Port Coquitlam we had a soup kitchen – so we'd often encounter people from all walks of life.

I found myself really needing to think about what I say and how I get to know people.

Is it appropriate to be asking a person I have just met questions like "where do you live?"

They may be homeless - If I ask that, the new person may feel uncomfortable.

If they respond with an unusual answer, how prepared am I to respond?

If I start talking about children, I once again may be in a risky area - perhaps they had children who are no longer in their care?.... Perhaps a child has died?

Now in saying this, I am not suggesting that people I met at the soup kitchen are necessarily any different to people we meet each day, I just found myself more

conscious of what I said because I was more aware that they very likely were there because of adverse life situations.

So I started thinking about what were appropriate things to talk about.

Perhaps I could start talking about a movie I enjoyed recently and ask what their favourite movie was?

Perhaps, as I got to know them more we could talk about more meaningful things...perhaps "why" we like the movie?..

...This is just a simple example ...- but we may connect on a deeper level and get some insight into who we are and what is important.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist is asked a very direct question "who are you?"

He began by stating who he wasn't!

"I am not the messiah, No I am not the prophet ...nor Elijah"...

....but he said ..



....“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,  
Make straight the path of the Lord”...

....He was identifying with his purpose in life - to usher  
in the Christ..That was his focus.

Now I'm not suggesting that next time you are invited  
to a local meeting or sports club an you have to  
introduce yourself you get up and say,...

...“Hi my name is Gina and I my purpose in life is to be  
an example of Jesus Christ in my community.”

That will probably not go down well -except perhaps if  
you are visiting the Baptist Golf club.

But Who am I? is one of the big questions in life....

....alongside “What is the purpose of life?”

As Christians we know that each person is much more  
than what they do and the role they have in society.

We each have a divine purpose and amazing potential.

For the last few nights as I lie in bed bed I have pondered that question..... "Who am I?...."

.....What is my essence?

It is a very powerful question, yet so simple.

When we strip away all the busyness and doing ....and focus on the being - get back to the basics - back to the essence of **who we are** - we **grow...**

**We grow in awareness and purpose.**

And we embrace the mystery

So the challenge or action for us this week is to take some time....

.... -perhaps set aside some special time during the day .....or as you sleep or wake in the morning and reflect on Who am I? - underneath...my own essence...not my roles or place in society...

- but the "**I am**" - before God...the vulnerable, wonderful ...true self that God created...

....the little dot in the vastness of the universe...that God loves and calls...

When I reflect, the words of psalm 8 come to me and my own prayer is something like this:

When I look at your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what am I that you are mindful of me?  
A mere mortal that you care for me?

Yet you have made me a little lower than God,  
and crowned me with glory and honour.  
You have entrusted me with many gifts  
and created me in your image.  
You gave me the gift of yourself  
- the ultimate outpouring of your love.  
**You** who are the essence of love....**you** who are love

Who am I?  
Who am I really Lord?  
Who am I in your sight, in your love?  
**WHO** am I?  
Who **AM** I?  
Who am **I**?