First Session
Talk Outline: “Who Am I?”

Theme:
Our True Identity Comes from God Alone
(See Matthew 16:13-20)

This talk is about fear – the fear that comes when we don't know who we are. All fear is based on uncertainty, doubt and darkness. We are afraid of what we do not see or know. If we do not know ourselves, there will be uncertainty, doubt and darkness. Our uncertainty and doubt about ourselves leads us to fear. When we are afraid we often look to others to take our fear away. We do that by seeking their approval. We ask them in so many ways to tell us who we are. To tell us we're okay. Other people will be happy to do that for us when it suits their needs. But why depend on them when only God can name us and give us our true identity?

The purpose of this talk is to demonstrate two truths: (1) that most people do not know who they are; and (2) that their true identity comes from God alone.

You might begin your talk by asking the candidates, “Do you know who you are?” Ask a few of the candidates, “Who are you, Joe?” “Who are you, Bill?” This should demonstrate that most people do not know who they are and that is one important reason why they live with fear and anxiety.

I. Who Am I?

A. Starting Point: “Who is Jesus?”

B. Matthew, Chapter 16, Presents the Question “Who is Jesus.”

1. The question of “Who is Jesus?” is the central question of our faith.

   a. Our purpose in life is to know, love and serve God.

   b. If we don’t know Jesus, who is God, then how can we fulfill our purpose in life?

2. We cannot know answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” until we can answer the question, “Who am I?”
II. Do You Know Who You Are?

A. “Who Are You?”

*Note:* Have several men answer this question and write their responses on the board.

B. Why Is It Critical That We Know Our True Identity?

1. No one can know or love you if you don’t know yourself.
   a. We cannot love what we do not know.
   b. When we don’t know who we are and others love us, they love an illusion they created for us.
      (1) They love the identity they want us to be, but that is not who we are.
      (2) Your wife may have married this illusion, and you may have suffered since by trying to become the identity and person she wants you to be.

2. If we do not know who we are, there will be uncertainty and doubt.
   a. Our uncertainty and doubt about ourselves leads to fear.
   b. When we are afraid, we often look to others to take our fear away by seeking their approval.
      (1) We ask them to tell us that we are okay.
      (2) We ask them to tell us who we are (*e.g.*, story of Claire Booth Luce and Marilyn Monroe).
      (3) Others are happy to do that when it suits their needs.
   c. Result: Anyone who comes along with an opinion can decide for us who we are.
III. What Your True Identity Is Not.

A. It Is Not Your Job Title.

1. People call us by our job title so often it can become our identity.

2. But job titles describe what we do for a living, not who we are.
   a. “I” am not my job title, that is not who my “I” is.  
      [Note: Write “I” on the black board.]
   b. My job is a commitment I made to myself, my family and my employer.
   c. Before I held my current job, I had an identity.
   d. My “me” is my job; my “I” (my existence) is not my job.  
      [Note: Write “Me” on the black board.]

3. If we tie our identity into our job title, changing jobs can be traumatic.
   a. Retired from active duty with the Army on 1 Jul 03.
   b. Prior titles: Judge, Your Honor, Lieutenant Colonel
   c. Suddenly, “just an attorney.”
      (1) Missed deference given MJ & LTC.
      (2) At times, it affected the way I felt about myself.
      (3) Fell into trap of considering my I to be my job title.

B. It Is Not Your Race, Color or State You Are From.

1. Those labels tell us about our genes, ancestry and background.

2. Those labels do not tell us who we are.

3. Aristotle called such attributes “accidents.”
C. It Is Not Your Name. If you moved and changed your name, would you be a different person?

D. It Is Not a Father or a Husband.

1. Who were you before you were a parent? Were you nobody then? Who will you be after your children are gone?

2. Who were you before you were married? Your existence, who you are, did not come into being on the day you were married.

E. It Is Not An Addiction.

1. You are not “an alcoholic,” despite what AA says.

2. It would be more correct to say: “Hi, my name is Jeff, and I live with the disease (or condition) of alcoholism.”

F. It Is Not the Image You Create for the Public.

1. Many of us create an image at work, at home, in our parish and in our neighborhood.

2. We may begin to believe that the carefully crafted image we have created is, in fact, who we are.

3. Mythcial Narcissus – Fell in love with his image reflected in a pool of water, tried to kiss himself, fell into the pool and drowned.

4. We can fall in love with the image we create, believing that is who we are, and then like Narcissus, drown in a cesspool of vanity and pride.

IV. Self-love Is Important.

A. We Need to Love Ourselves.

1. Many people don’t love, or even like, themselves.

2. We need to love ourselves as Jesus commanded us when he said: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:39)
B. Self-Love Can be Destructive. We can fall in love with our image and drown in a cesspool of vanity and pride.

V. Who We Are May Be Found In Matthew 16:13-20.

A. Jesus’ Question to His Disciples: “But who do you say I am?”

1. Jesus asks that question because he wants us to know who we are.

2. Peter’s reply: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

B. Jesus Then Gives the Key to Understanding Our Identity.

1. Jesus: “Blessed are you, Simon . . . No mere human has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” [Note: This is the most important part of the identity talk.]

a. The Father, not a mere human, reveals the identity of Jesus.

b. In the same way, God, and not mere humans, reveals our true identity.

c. God, not other people, reveals our identity when we look to God for approval, not to friends, spouses, bosses or parents

2. When Peter looked to God, rather than others, God revealed to Peter his true identity.

a. Jesus: “You are the Rock, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

b. In other words, Peter learns that:

(1) He is God’s creation and his identity comes from God.

(2) As long as he remembers his true identity as a child of God, and doesn’t allow others to tell him who he is, he will have a solid foundation and can be used by God.
3. God can build a church on Peter because Peter knows who he is.

4. Death cannot take away our identity.
   
   a. Jesus adds that the “jaws of death shall not prevail against what I build on this rock.”
   
   b. Once we know who we are in relation to God, even death cannot take away our identity.

VI. Conclusion.

A. The Question Jesus Asks Peter.

1. Jesus: “Who do you say I am?”

2. Answer: “You, Jesus, are indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.”

B. How Do We Know the Answer to that Question?

1. We know this is true because our identity comes from the same God.

2. We also are children of God.

3. When we know and remember our true identity as children of God:
   
   a. We no longer depend upon others to tell us who we are.
   
   b. We no longer live with the fear that we are not enough without more power, prestige and possessions.
   
   c. There is no fear because we know that our true identity is that each of us is a child of God.
   
   d. That is who we are, that is who we really are.
First Session
Sample Talk: “Who Am I?”

Theme:
Our True Identity Comes from God Alone
(See Matthew 16:13-20)

I. Who Am I?

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16,
Jesus presents the central question of our faith.
He asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”
[Note: Read Mt. 16:13-20]

This is the central question of our faith
because our purpose in life is to know, love and serve God.
If we don’t know Jesus, who is God,
how then can we fulfill our purpose in life?

This important question of “Who is Jesus?” cannot be answered
without an answer to the same question for ourselves:
“Who am I?”
So let us look at the “Who am I?” question,
and then return to the question “Who is Jesus?”

II. Do You Know Who You Are?

Do you know who you are?
[Note: Have several men answer that question
and write their responses on the black board.]

If you have any doubt about the question of who you are,
most likely you will continue to search for an answer.
And if you don’t find an answer for yourself,
most likely you will look to others to tell you who you are.

Shortly before Marilyn Monroe committed suicide,
Claire Booth Luce observed that Marilyn
had been looking into people’s eyes,
using them for a mirror, as in the story of Snow White.
She was asking: “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?”
Or, in other words, somebody tell me:
“Who am I? Am I worth something?
Something more than my good looks?
Does anyone love me for my real self?”

This woman who had millions of fans was searching for an identity.
In a culture that glorified her body, she wanted someone to convince her that her identity was deeper than the surface of paper centerfolds where her image appeared.

To answer the question, “Who am I?” can require great risk.
Many of us are afraid to tell others who we are.
Father John Powell tells of a visitor who unexpectedly addressed this fear when the visitor said:
“If I tell you who I am and you don’t like me, then that’s all I have.”

But why do we depend so much on others to like us, and to tell us who we are?
Why are we so addicted to approval?

When we don’t know who we really are and depend on others for approval, then anyone who comes along with an opinion can decide for us who we are.
Whether that may be our parents, teachers, co-workers, our boss or our priest.
In fact, if you have any doubt about who you are, I am going to tell you who you are in a few minutes.
And even though I’m going to tell you the truth, don’t you find it odd that you are so open to have someone else tell you who you are?

III. What Your True Identity Is Not.

It Is Not Your Job Title.

Most of us think our identity is a title we’re given because people call us that and we begin to believe it.
The titles we use to describe ourselves usually have to do with what we do for a living, such as: “attorney,” “physician,” “salesperson,” “Boeing worker,” “priest.”
The fact is that “I” am not an attorney.
That isn’t who my “I” is.

[Note: Write “I” on the blackboard.]

Being an attorney is my profession.
It is a commitment I made to myself, my family and to my employer.
It is a gift from God.
But before I was an attorney, did I not have an identity?
And so, right now my “me” is an attorney.

[Note: Write “me” on the blackboard.]
But my “I,” my existence, is not a lawyer.

**It Is Not Your Race, Color or State You Are From.**

Other labels we use to describe our identity, such as “white,”
“black,” “Asian,” “German,” “Irish,” “Italian,” “French,”
tell us about our genes and our ancestry.
But they don’t tell us who we are.
Some even base their identity on the state they live in.
Have you ever met someone from Texas?

Here’s another: “I’m the name my family gave me and proud of it.”
If you changed your name and moved to Chicago,
would you be a different person?

**It Is Not a Father or a Husband.**

Then there are labels we are *convinced* are much deeper.
For instance women strongly identify with this label: “I’m a Mother.”
Some base their identity on “I’m a father” or “I’m a husband.”
When women and men base their identity on such titles as:
“T’m a mother,” or “I’m a father,” then I think we need to ask,
Who was I before I was a mother/father? Was I a nobody then?
Who will I be after the children are gone?
Is my entire identity dependent on my children?
Some of you may listen to Dr. Laura on the radio.
Dr. Laura describes herself this way: “I am my kid’s mom.”
I’m sorry, Dr. Laura. God may have created you to bear children
and to raise them but that’s not the identity God gave you
when you were in your mother’s womb,
which didn’t change when you discovered a child in *your* womb.
Has your identity nothing at all to do
with the God who created you *and* your child?
Who are you beyond being a mom?
What if you couldn’t have children?
Would you call yourself: “A woman who cannot have kids?”

It Is Not An Orientation or An Addiction.

Another label others convince us to put on ourselves has to do with an orientation we may be born with or acquire in life. Such as sexual orientation. For example, those who call themselves lesbians, homosexuals or bisexuals.
Now I’m not saying it isn’t important to name and own that part of us that needs to be named and owned. There is much denial in our society in regard to sexuality because of the shame and rejection attached to such labels. And so there’s nothing wrong with accepting one’s orientation with dignity instead of shame.
But, again, is your sexual orientation your entire identity? Is that the first thing you think of to describe yourself? Surely that’s not the first thing God thought of when He created you in your mother’s womb.

For others, identity can be based entirely on what drug one is addicted to. For instance some of us might say, “I’m an alcoholic.” Is that really who you are? Is that your whole identity? Again, I don’t want to minimize the need for persons with the condition of alcoholism to accept and own this difficult problem.
But that, I say, is not who you are.

It Is Not the Image You Create For the Public.

Another form of identity we put on ourselves is the image we try to create. For instance, we may fall in love with our image as a fun and attractive person; as an important business person or a talented performer; as a great mechanic or a computer whiz; or as someone who boasts of how active he or she is (as though inactivity is somehow a sin).
We begin to believe the image we worked so hard to establish is, in fact, who we are.
The mythical Narcissus had a similar problem. He fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. When he tried to kiss himself, he fell in and drowned.

IV. Self-Love Is Important.

Self-love is important for our self-esteem. There are so many of us who don’t like ourselves. We need to love ourselves as Jesus commanded us when he said we are to love our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves (cf. Mt. 22:39). But self-love can also be self-destructive. We can fall into our own reflection as did Narcissus, and drown in a cesspool of vanity and pride.

V. Who We Are May Be Found In Matthew 16:13-20.

Jesus asks the question of who do we say he is because he wants us to know who we are. And until we know who we really are, no one can know us.

Now, to discover who we really are, I think we might look again at Peter as he is presented in the gospel reading I read earlier.

In response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?” Peter replies: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Then, in the next sentence, Jesus gives us the key to understanding our identity. He says, “Blessed are you, Simon . . .!

No mere human has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” In other words, the heavenly Father reveals the identity of Jesus, and not a “mere human.”

It is this same God, and not other people, who reveals the identity of each one of us when we look to God for approval and not to our friends, spouses, boss or parents.

Here’s what Peter heard when he looked to God and not to mere humans: “You are the Rock, and on this rock I will build my church.”
In other words, God says to Peter,
“You are of me, Peter, of my creation.
And as long as your identity is of me, from me and for me,
then you will always have a solid place on which to stand.
It is with such rock solid people as you, Peter,
who know your true identity that I can now build my church.
Because now I can trust you that you won’t let anyone else name you,
or put labels on you, but me.”

As if all this is not enough, to sum up Peter’s identity Jesus adds:
“The jaws of death shall not prevail against what I build on this rock.”
Here Jesus seems to say that once we know who we are in relation to God,
then even death cannot take away our identity.
Death can take our possessions, our prestige and our power,
but not even death can take away
the identity given to those who love God.

VI. Conclusion.

And so now we are ready to conclude with the question Jesus asks of Peter:
“Who do you say that I am?”
When we know who we are, it’s easy to answer.
“You, Jesus, are indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.”
We know this because we know
our identity comes from the same God.
For we, too, are children of God.
That’s why we need not be afraid of not being enough.
Because we’ve found our true identity as children of God.
That’s who we are.
That is who we really are!