

This week I started reading a book called *The Juggler's Children* by Carolyn Abraham. It tells the story of her quest for her own identity. Born in England, she was six years old when her family immigrated to Canada and almost immediately other children started to ask her, where are you from, what are you, who are you. Her answers were complicated and uncertain, for while she knew some of her family was from India, her grandfather looked distinctly Chinese and there were family stories about a British sea captain and a Portuguese great-grandmother, as well. The stories were complicated by embarrassed silences about certain relatives who either did not know who their fathers might have been, or who, because of the racist and colonial assumptions with which they were raised, were unwilling to talk about a relative of one ethnicity or another. It was after the birth of her daughter that Abraham really felt a drive to discover her ancestry, and being a science reporter, she began with cheek swabs from her parents to seek DNA analysis and went from there.

I'm only on chapter two, so I can't tell you how it turns out yet.

But I suspect that her experience is not unknown to a lot of folks here this morning, that sense of coming from all sorts of places and peoples, a certain pride in parts of our ancestry and frustration about the unanswered and often unanswerable questions when it comes to other parts of who we are. Even though my daughter declared in Grade 2 that our family is boring (with both of her parents and all four of her grandparents having been born in Canada), in my own background is some Ojibway, an ancestor whose identity I will never know because for a white girl in northern Ontario 90 years ago, such a relationship was truly shameful and was not allowed to continue. I mourn the loss of that part of my identity, because while of course who we are, each of us, is shaped by many factors, where we come from is an important part of it.

By the time the First Letter of John was written towards the end of the first century, Christianity had spread far beyond its Jewish, Galilean and Judean roots. Within a decade of Jesus' resurrection, already Gentiles, no-Jews, had been baptized and accepted into the fellowship of believers, and then Paul, Barnabas, and others travelled throughout the Roman Empire and beyond to spread the gospel, to tell people that God loved them and that Christ's life, death and resurrection meant that a closer relationship with God was now possible. And all those different people, from all those different places, speaking all those different languages together were part of the early church. It was quite remarkable, really, for up to that point, at least in that part of the world, only military conquest had perviously been able to unite such a diversity of peoples under any one banner.

In that part of the world at that time, when someone asked you where are you from, what are you, who are you, the answer always, always, had to do with who your father was.

So when our second lesson begins with the proclamation that we have been called children of God, for indeed, that is what we are, it's not just a platitude and it's not at all a romantic notion. It is a fundamental statement of identity. We are children of God.

Doesn't matter where we're from. Doesn't matter who are ancestors are. Doesn't matter what we have done in our past. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are children of God.

We are all unique people, of course, and our cultural heritage and backgrounds are important and precious gifts that, taken together, make us all richer. Our common heritage in Christ doesn't negate that.

But it does put our differences into perspective. What makes us different from one another is important; our oneness in Christ is more important.

A couple of years after the 9/11 attacks, a survey of Canadian Muslims asked which was more fundamental to their sense of identity; their Canadian citizenship, or their Muslim faith. The vast majority said their faith, and there was great consternation in this country at that.

However, I think they had it right. If someone were to ask me today which was more important to me, my identity as a Canadian or my identity as a Christian, I know that I would say that being a follower of Jesus Christ, being a child of God, is absolutely the core of who I am. I happen to live in this place, where politicians and cartographers have drawn imaginary lines on this planet God created for all humanity to share. But I am first and foremost a child of that God.

And because of that, because our core identity is as a follower of Jesus, sometimes that means that the world hates us, or at the very least, really doesn't get us. Because we are followers of the risen Christ, we're not going to live with the same values or priorities as the rest of the world. We're going to choose to forgive those who have hurt us, when our world would call out for revenge or punishment. We're going to choose to put the needs of other people before our own, when our world would tell us to look out for number one. We're going to choose to live more simple lives so that some of the worldly resources that might otherwise be ours will go to feeding the hungry and housing the homeless. We're going to choose to be here on a Sunday morning instead of, or at least,

before, going out to brunch or sitting over coffee with a newspaper or tablet. We're going to choose to spend some of our time praying, and reading the Bible, and seeking to grow in our spiritual life, when the world would tell us to eat, drink and be merry.

One of the most important tasks of every human being is to figure out, who am I? Because once we know the answer to that question, who am I, we are a good part of the way to knowing how we will choose to live in the world, in our every day lives.

Who are we? We are, through the resurrection of Jesus, children of God.