

**It is I myself**

*Acts 3:12-19; Luke 24:36b-43*

My name is Derek Browning and I think I am still the Minister here. Or at least, I hope to be the Minister here again in July of this year.

There will be time enough to share my holiday snaps on a later occasion, and you'll all need to be aware that most of my sermons will start with 'when I was Moderator' for weeks to come. I'll give you cards to hold up when I've used it too often. But you'll forgive me, I hope, if I take a little time to acclimatise back into parish life. It has been an extraordinary year. I've been introduced at events as "Moderator", of course; I've had "Your Grace", "Your Eminence", "Most Holy One"; from the Pope's sock-makers I have an envelope addressed to "The Impeccable Derek Browning". And of course there was that time, once, in that western fishing village on the Clyde I got, "Oi, you in the lace". Trust me, my feet have never really been all that far from the ground. As my two chaplains will attest since their job is to keep me as humble as is humanly possible. It's been quite a task, as you can imagine.

Knowing who we are, knowing where we have come from, knowing where we might like to be going in the future is fundamental to a balanced and confident good mental health. Whilst it might not come naturally to many, and can feel a little narcissistic, having that sense of identity, knowing who you are and what you stand for and what you are about.

Establishing your identity, working out who you are and what you are going to be is one of the great thrills and challenges of growing up. Last week when I was in London I had lunch with my godson who is now twenty. It was quite something to have an adult conversation with him about his studies, his thoughts about travel and his future career, whilst remembering the time I cradled him in my arms as a baby at his baptism. It's a feeling I am sure any of us who have had anything to do with children will recognise. What will they grow up to be? What will be their successes and failures, what will harm them or make them happy?

At the General Assembly last year I was about to go back into the Hall to chair a session of the Assembly when the steward at the door asked me to provide identification so that I could go in. I thought being dressed like the Pirates of the Caribbean, or as someone asked me last Sunday at the Oliviers as a character from the musical 'Hamilton', might have been enough. Needless to say I did get the identity of the steward and he was helpfully moved to lighter duties.

Some of you might just about be old enough to remember the Saturday night television programme featuring the impressionist Mike Yarwood. My grandparents used to tell me about it. He'd always finish with a song, and start it with the words, "And this is me." With so many personalities he could mimic, I often wondered how he would establish who the real Mike Yarwood was.

On a more serious note, in an age when identity theft is a real thing, when our digital and credit identities can be misappropriated by criminals who attempt to empty our bank accounts, or access paperwork for passports and other things, establishing who you are, that you are the 'real' you, has rarely been more important, and more complex. I know some here in Church today have had to deal with this and it is time-consuming, frustrating and upsetting.

In our passage from Luke's Gospel, what was it like for Jesus to establish His identity again with the disciples? Can you even begin to imagine it? For three years they'd been with Him. For three years He had taught them, laughed with them, wept with them, ate with them, slept alongside them, berated them, loved them, fed them, died in front of them.

And now, in Jerusalem, in that Upper Room, there He was. Jesus. The One they'd failed to follow; the One they had all betrayed and abandoned; the One they'd failed to recognise on the Road to Emmaus. Standing in front of them, telling them to reflect on their doubting and fearful hearts. Telling them to look at Him, His hands and feet. Telling them to touch Him. Telling them to get Him something to eat and, nice touch, eating a fish supper in front of them.

"It is I, myself."

All His ministry, Jesus had been telling people Who He was. The healer, the teacher, the comforter, the challenger, the water, the bread, the light, the door, the shepherd, the vine, the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection.

“It is I, myself.”

He'd asked Peter, “But who do you say that I am?”

He would present to Thomas the pierced hands and side.

But still the disciples, disbelieving for joy, wondered on. Who is this? Who is this man, really?

The child of Bethlehem; the carpenter's son from Nazareth; the sight-giver; the mind-restorer; the water-walker; the risen from the dead? Would the real Jesus please stand up?

“It is I, myself.”

It's two thousand years later, and we are still asking the question, “Who is Jesus”, and it is good that we are still asking that question. It's two thousand years later and we still need to find not one, knock-out answer to the question, but to realise that there are, still, many answers to the question, “Who is Jesus?” It matters that we realise that there is more than one answer. It matters that we realise that as we grow and develop in our faith, and fresh insight comes, our answers will change too.

He stands before us all, and He says to each one of us, “It is I, myself.” How do we respond? With disbelief? With fear? With hope? With joy? With amazement? With faith?

Today, in this glorious building of faith and hope and love, which through you, the people of this place, has grown and made something new, we are not simply about putting our thumbprints on history, we are about making a statement of commitment to the future. Whether our faith is weak or strong; whether our faith is new or old; whether our faith is vibrant or needing a kick-start. We stand alongside the Jesus Who has said, “It is I, myself”, and we are bold to say, “It is us, ourselves”, the followers of Jesus today. Our commitment is to growth and service and usefulness to the good news. Our commitment is to the people inside and outside this building

who need a little light, a little hope, a little welcome, a little love, a little peace in this time of gas attacks and bombing in Syria.

Our commitment is to an identity forged in first century Palestine but still speaking to C21st Morningside, and beyond. Shyly, proudly, uncertainly, confidently, nervously, hopefully, it is us, ourselves who stand with the One Who said, "It is I, myself", reaching out to witness to the fact that we are still here, that we still have things to do, that we still have things to be, that we still have dreams to fulfil, that we still have promises to fulfil, that we still have faith to live out, that we still have hope to offer, that we still have love to share.

Here on this day, graciously and generously, we offer ourselves and rededicate ourselves to the cause of Christ. Putting into practice what we believe, and even what we doubt, knowing that we remain called to make a difference for good, believing that we ourselves stand with the One Who said, "It is I, myself."

Our faith, our hope, our love, His friends.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**