

Leviticus 26:12

And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

Matthew 6:25-33

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“The Two Greatest Questions – Ever”

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This person is driving his car, he's probably one of those famous people that I know or that you would know, and he was driving down the highway, he stopped to pick up a hitchhiker. As the hitchhiker got in the car, he sat down and he looked over at the driver, this famous person, and he stared. He couldn't believe it, and he kept looking, then he'd look down, then he'd look away and scratch his head, they he'd think, he'd look at that famous person again. Pretty soon, he just couldn't contain himself any longer. He looked over at that person and he said, "Do you know who you are?"

It's the first greatest question, ever. Do you know who you are? It's a great question. It's one that Francesco di Bernardone grappled with. He had just come back from the war. His body was beat up, and he was now in a bed that was almost his deathbed, and he was sick, and he was grappling with "Who am I? What am I? What am I all about? What are my values? What's important to me?" His family was one of great wealth. They were people.. his dad was a cloth merchant, manufactured the finest of silks. Down in the bowels of a sweat shop, where the poor gave every ounce of energy that they had to manufacture all of the cloth, the bolts of cloth. And as he lay on that bed, grappling with who he was, all of a sudden as he lay there he started to get better with his body, but his mind and his heart were in turmoil. Eventually he was healed enough to go to church, and he sat in a large church in the front row where his parents and his parents friends and all the people in the community that were bedecked in their jewels and their finest of finery and finest of materials and he looked at them, and then he looked in the back of the church, and behind him, he saw nothing but the poor, huddled together. Huddled together, surviving. And he looked up at the cross. There was a man on the cross. All of a sudden he stood up, and he shouted, "No, no, no," and he ran out of the church. And he

ran to his home, and he went on the second floor where all the cloth and the bolts of material were, and he threw them out of the window to the poor that were down below. And he said, "Go and be free. Go. You don't have to be oppressed any more." And he ran out of the house, ran out into the fields where the birds were, where the lilies were, where the Brother Sun was and the Sister Moon. He could not contain himself any longer, and he became the person who rejected at that moment his family, his inheritance, his church. And when he rejected his church, he was now called a heretic. And he was brought before the Pope, Pope Innocent II, and as he stood there before the Pope with guards on either side, and he had a few of his friends behind him, he looked up at the Pope and he said the words of Scripture that we heard earlier. "Why do you worry? Why should you be so anxious? Why do you worry about what you eat and what you drink and what you wear? That's not important. Look out at the fields, look at the lilies, look at the birds of the air. God takes care of them, won't God take care of you?" And at that moment the guards grabbed him and started to hustle him out. The Pope stood up and went, "No, wait. Wait." The Pope came down from the platform and stood before Francesco and he said, "What do you want?" He said, "I just want to be who I am. Just be me. I want to be free. I don't want to be bound by anything else." The Pope looked at him and said, "Then go. Go in the name of the Lord and preach the world. Go out and build your communes. Gather your disciples with you. Celebrate your Brother Sun and your Sister Moon. Don't deny that any more. Come out of your misery. Go." Some years later, Francesco di Bernardone was canonized into sainthood as St. Francis of Assisi. The Brother Sun. The Sister Moon. And sometimes it's a painful journey.

Do you know who you are? Sometimes that's a hard question, and we grapple and grapple with it. Some years ago I came out of my office, a client left, and after that client left, the phone rang. It was my Dad. He said, "Dave, do you have any time to visit?" I said, "I do." He said, "Mom and I want to come over to the office." I said, "That would be great. I'd love to see you." He said, "It's a business meeting." As they came and sat down, that German little boy, that Mennonite brogue flew out of him as tears just rolled down his cheeks, and he started to say, "I don't know who I am any more. I don't know what's important. I've done so much, and now I've been retired fifteen years, and I don't know who I am. I don't know what I want." I looked at him and I said, "Do you remember 1939?" He said, "Yes, I took a little time off from teaching band, and I went and started my Masters Degree at the University of Kansas, I went to school." I said, "Did you ever finish it?" He said, "No, I didn't." I said, "Did that have any purpose for you? Do you think that's something you might want to consider?" He said, "That sounds great. I think I'll consider that." He and Mom packed up and they went over there to the registrar's office in Lawrence and he said "Hi, I'm Jake Dalke and I've come back here to finish my Masters" and the registrar said, "That's wonderful. When did you start it?" and he said "1939." He looked at this gray-haired man and said, "Just a moment." They went back to the office where he could see all the people, they gathered around and looked for his transcripts and couldn't find them. It was too old. Finally they located something, and they came forward and the registrar looked at him and said, "Mr. Dalke, welcome back. We welcome you. You're fifteen hours yet. Enroll for fifteen hours, and you can get your Masters." And he did. He and Mom went back to school, and he walked down the hill, he

said, with all those young whippersnappers, and got that degree because he was in search of who he was.

Do you know who you are? Do you know who your are? It's a great question, and it's one that no matter what stage of life we're in, we keep asking it. We keep asking it. That's the first great question. The other day, some of you know Ray and I occupy an office over here together, we were sitting there and a woman walked in, and she stood there and mentioned she had a life-threatening disease. We said, "How are you?" and she said, "I'm scared, I'm really scared. I don't know what's going to happen." And Ray looked at her, and he said, "Do you know whose you are?" Do you know whose you are? I think it's the second greatest question, ever. Do you know whose you are? We've answered that question some, today, already. The bells rang it. Karen has played it. We sang it. "All creatures of our God and king." All creatures of *our* God and king. Jesus talked about it. Prophets have talked about it. Do you know whose you are?

You know, I'm amazed when I think about that one book. I thought it was just written not too long ago, that's my naivete. It was written in 1922. Marjorie Williams wrote it. That little book about the velveteen rabbit. Many of us have read it to our kids all their lives, and we read it to ourselves, and it was read to us. *The Velveteen Rabbit*. There's that passage in that book that is just so tender and warm, that we lift out so many times. I've thought about it so much. It's the one where the little boy's in his nursery, and while he's in his nursery he has a rabbit, it's a stuffed rabbit, and he plays with it a lot. But it's Christmas, and during Christmas time there'll be other gifts. And so now the little boy receives all these gifts that have batteries. Make noises, and they roll all over the floor on their own. And the little rabbit is pushed to the side and becomes very insignificant. Until one day, the little rabbit talks to his one friend he has in the nursery, another stuffed animal. It's the skin horse. And he looks at him and he says, "I need to know something. I want to know what's real. What is real? Is it like what we see here, is it stuff that have batteries and make noises, and they buzz inside and they have stick-out handles? Is that what's real?" And the skin horse said, "No, real isn't how you're made. Real is when a child plays with you for a long time. No, when a child loves you for a long time. Then you become real." And the little rabbit said, "Well, does it hurt?" "Yeah, sometimes it hurts. But when you're real, you don't mind being hurt." Then the little rabbit said, "Does it happen all at once, or bit by bit?" The skin horse says, "No, it takes a long time. In fact, it doesn't happen to people that break easily or have sharp edges or have to be carefully kept. No, because you see, by the time you're real, all you hair has been loved off." There are a lot of real people in this place, let's face it. "Your eyes sort of drop out. You get kind of loose in the joints, and you feel kind of shabby. But when you're real, this doesn't matter, because when you're real, you can't be ugly," he said. "You can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand. Except to people who don't understand."

Do you know whose you are? Well you belong to a God that understands. You belong to a God that says, "I accept you like you are. I accept you the way you are, the way you were born, the way your history is, your background, your interests, everything that's brought you to this very moment right here today, I accept you like that. I understand." We belong to a God from that Book of Leviticus, that said "I walk among you, I walk

among you, and I will be your God, and you will be my people." That was the blessing to the people in Israel, and it's the blessing to all of us here this morning. There are a lot of questions we could ask. But it seems to me like these are two of the greatest questions, really. Do you know who you are, and do you know whose you are. And Francesco di Bernardone helps us get in touch with that first question, as he grappled and grappled with who he was, in search of his Brother Sun and his Sister Moon, and eventually became Saint Francis. And that little rabbit gets us in touch with the second question, "Do you know whose you are?" as that little rabbit hops all around over the book of Leviticus, and hears the words "I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you will be my people." Do you know who you are? Do you know whose you are? Amen.