

Glimpse

Identity Crisis

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My younger brother's daughter was doing her research for her Doctorate degree. Her subject area was and is the rehabilitation of the brain after trauma to one or other areas of the brain. As part of that study she invited her father and me to submit to an MRI or Magnetic Resonance Imaging. This huge machine can take some kind of pictures of parts of our bodies for detecting what the doctors are looking for. My kid-brother has two Doctorates; I have not one.

On the day of the project my brother arrived before me. The laboratory was full of dials and meters and technologists who seemed all very serious and important. As I walked in, my brother greeted me warmly and I made a definitive declaration, "Well Mike, today we're going to finally settle for all times our sibling rivalry." We were the only persons in the lab who were laughing. I figured that, either they were taking their work too seriously, or they had unresolved sibling rivalries themselves. I suppose ever since Cain and Able in the book of *Genesis*, sisters and brothers have struggled to find their names, their value and importance within the family structures. At least for me, I wasn't aware of such a contest/tension while experiencing it. Only later did I understand what was going on among all six of my parents' children. We were all trying to find out who we were and who got parental approval most and who then was loved the most.

The Book of *Genesis* also reveals the story of how Jacob, the younger brother of Esau tricked his Father to bestow the blessing and birthright on him instead of Esau. Gaining stature, power, and identity is such an ancient human drive. Persons from small and large family units all experience the search for the self-truth. The popular term for this is "Identity Crisis". There are many crazy and even destructive ways to resolve the crisis. Anger is a force of resisting. "I was told or forced to be this or that and so I want to choose to be the opposite!" That anger can result in distancing from the family or group or person whom we thought was the imposer. In this scenario, the resultant identity is still under the influence of someone against whom we are resisting. That identity is still false.

The question comes down to this. Am I who I am supposed to be or am I supposed to be who I really am? Our society or culture can reduce me to a "supposed-to

person". Many find out who they are by contrasting themselves against others. "At least I'm not, short, fat, red-haired, from over-there, look like that." These 'contrastists' still do not know and accept themselves. They know only who they are not. 'Comparisonists' have even a heavier burden. Everyone else around them becomes a ruler in two meanings of that word. Others are those against which the self is measured, as with a ruler. The other meaning of 'rule' is the one who governs and controls. The 'comparisonist' becomes dominated by their submission to the apparent good of the other. Their good can seem better than the good which is diminished by the comparer. This is the 'Compari-sinning' of being addicted to wanting to be somebody else.

The resolution to these identity issues is that each of us is essentially a mystery! We love names, labels and exactness. Mystery doesn't fit that hunger. How about this? We are not called to figure ourselves out. That would be boring. We are not meant to be solved by an imaging machine or by imaging relationships within or outside the family. Each of us is always a "going-to-be" and that search, discovery, journey is anything but boring. We have been given, and not by trickery, our birthright. Each is a mysterious pilgrim who learns slowly that other pilgrims are wandering around too. Some of them think they know who they are by their accomplishments and trophies. Others might be nervous about not being all they should be. We are who we are through the creation and grace and gifts of the Creator. Nobody else is supposed to be me, nor I like anyone else. Self-acceptance of 'my-stery' is the great prayer of gratitude to God. It is just a glimpse and is how God glimpses us too.