

A Reflection by the Moderator of the General Assembly, The Rt Rev Martin Fair based on John Chapter 1:1-18 shared with the ministers of the Church in the summer of 2020 to help give colleagues some time off.

He shares this holding up a book as he walks along the stony beach at Auchmithie.

### **Who am I?**

This book Sophie's World was in its day an international best seller. It's really an introduction to philosophy which may not make it sound like a page turner but its set up as a novel and is a great read. Let me read a small section for you. What is the most important thing in life? If we ask someone living on the edge of starvation, the answer is food. If we ask someone dying of cold, the answer is warmth. If we put the same question to someone who feels lonely and isolated, the answer will probably be the company of other people. But when those basic needs have been satisfied, will there be something that everybody needs. Philosophers think so. They believe that man can not live by bread alone. Of course everyone needs food and everyone needs love and care. But there is something else apart from that which everyone needs and that is, to figure out who we care and why we are here.

So there we have 2 big questions. Who am I and why am I here? Philosophical questions yes, but deep theological questions for sure. Who am I and why am I here? The first of these questions is one of identity and the second is one of purpose. Today we are going to think on the first question who am I? This question of our identity and next week we'll consider the second, why am I here? What's the point of me being on earth? What is my purpose? The author of Sophie's world offers us two thoughts as we begin this quest, of discovering our identity who I am. He begins by saying that we begin to discover who we are when we discover that we are not just ourselves. In other words that there are others around us and that it is in connecting with them, that we begin to discover who we are in terms of our connectedness to others. Maybe we can think of it this way. That it is impossible to understand ourselves without thinking about all those around us. Look for a moment at the pebbles on this stony beach. You can hardly think of one without the others. They somehow belong together. The second thing he suggests and this is a new

addition to the original writing of the book. He says that we begin to understand who we are, when we realise that we are connected with the world in which we live. And he goes as far as to say, that we can't understand who we are, we'll never ever have a true sense of our identity, unless we understand that it somehow wrapped up in our connectedness with where we are. So two things as we begin to answer. First of all our identity is in our connectedness with other people and our connectedness with the environment.

As for our connectedness to the creation, right at the beginning the book of Genesis makes it abundantly clear that we are part of what God has made. We have a pleasant special place within that. We are set as stewards over creation. But none the less we are part of it and our connectedness to it, is vital to who we are. I wonder who you see when you look up close at yourself. Who are you? What is your identity? In recent years of course we have seen the rise in so called identity politics. We hear people saying all the time: 'I identify as this or that or the next thing'. I guess as I think about myself, my Scottishness is important to me, but I also understand myself to be British. I identify I think about myself as a male, as a husband, as a father, as a son. There are so many aspects as how I might define myself. As I look to answer the question who am I? Everything that I have described so far is important to me. My connectedness to others, my connectedness to the creation and those other things that I have mentioned. My sense of who I am in relation to the place I come from, the people I'm part of and my understanding of myself in relation to family. Those who are immediately around me. All that is important as I think about my identity of who I am. But as a Christian there is something more. Of course there is something much more. Right there at the very start of John's gospel in the first chapter we hear the phrase: 'Children of God, children of God'. My friends, here is the key ultimately to who I am. Ultimately my identity is as a child of God.

Yes all those other things matter in terms of how I piece together my understanding of who I am. But they are all arranged underneath this key and crucial and most important conviction that first and foremost I am a child of God. This underpins everything else and without that, there is something essential missing. I am a child of God. That's who I am. That's who I identify as. My relating to other people, my relating to this planet all flow

out of the fact that first and foremost, I am related to a loving God who in His grace and through his son has declared me to be his child. It's on this solid rock that I build this firm foundation of being a child of God and this is my identity. This is who I am.

But even then there is something else that must be said and it's this. I am only a child of God because of what Jesus has done for me. Because Jesus came into the world for me, because Jesus has lived His life for me and in the end because Jesus gave His life for me. That's why I can say with confidence in response to the question who am I? I am a child of God because of Jesus. Friends, let us never ever take that for granted. Let us never ever become blasé about this truth, that Jesus gave Himself for us that we might be children of God. Let us then keep His cross ever before us as a reminder of this truth. Let us hold fast to His cross. By the cross we are children of God.