My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Eternal God of our Epiphany bodies, minds, hearts and spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight. Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Who are we? Not just today, but who have we been? Who put us there? Today’s Hebrew Bible scripture should take us all back in time, back to our own childhood. We can just imagine being like Samuel, a boy no older than about 6 years, when the world is full of possibilities and wonder. We’ve figured a few things out by that age, for sure, but at that tender age there is a blur between what we imagine the world can be and how the world treats those who know its limits. We’ve talked about both of these things before, imagining and liminal spaces, haven’t we? I hope I’m getting some nods out there. Or an “AMEN” or two. Alllright, thank you for that, let’s continue.

As children, we dreamed about the latest thing that we experienced. I thought I wanted to be a fireman after I saw a parade when I was 5. I wanted to be a doctor because I thought it was cool that he wore earphones that could hear heartbeats. I wanted to be a teacher because my mother was a teacher, and I would get to make friends and see them all day, 5 days a week, and that would be great fun, too.

Even as a child, I knew that I could be anything and dreamed those dreams. My wife, Kate, also wanted to be a fireman. She was told, in 1968, that girls could not do that work. And there were no work discrimination rules based on gender then. Her parents sent her to the local private school in that midwestern city she grew up with, and her dreams as a child were thus limited from being a scientist, or astronaut, or doctor, or lawyer. Women were not allowed to do that, she was told. She could be a teacher or a nurse.

And so we remember our January 3 sermon with this in mind, don’t we? Remembering that we are created in God’s image, for sure. And we have the Holy Spirit given to us at birth. Yeah, that’s right, and we have baptism to remind us that we are full and filled and washed for sin…but then…the world takes hold of us, and teaches us to divide ourselves in ways that God never intended. God didn’t make male and female so that one could dominate the other. Jesus doesn’t come and say that one race of people is favored more than another. The Spirit is in all of us, and is for all of us. God is rooting for us to live into the fulness of our gifts, right?

And last week we also talked about being given our angels and our wild beasts to wrestle with, both in this world and our lives. And those same two agents within us are the ones we again seek to call on throughout this week in our scripture and in the world. Who are we? Not just today, but who have we been? Who put us there? We hear a lot of folks and news outlets telling us about who we are today, both our individual and collective self-concept. All this violence. This is not us, this is not America, we tell ourselves. But that doesn’t remember our even near past, much less our distant past. We are a wounded nation that keeps inflicting its wounds on itself by focusing on winning a court case here and there and then trying to say that’s how we all should feel or live. So while courts give us legal boundary stakes, it is a deeper calling that we seek in order to live day-to-day. How we see each other. How we treat one another. Remember what the Bible says about one another?

I think about all of this when I put myself back in my childhood, in a little town called Broomfield, the Colorado equivalent of Nazareth in the 1960s, from which no one of consequence ever came or went. I think about the choices I’ve had in terms of my education, my mentors, my failures, and my mistakes. Like most young men, if you had asked me to describe myself, I would say I was a financial executive. That was my role, what I was paid to do. But it was not who I was called to be, and the search for my identity would take much more introspection and reflection than identification with any job, group, church, or political party.

Who are we? Not just today, but who have we been? Who put us there? We have moments that should wake us up, for sure, when we gather to support or protest a cause. What is our answer? It’s easy to generalize and say this or that is the duty of all peoples. But what is YOUR answer? Who do YOU say that you are?

We are reminded that we are to come before God as a child. But then we are told that we can only love God if we do this or that, and the outcome is all but pre-ordained as a result…what theologians call double-pre-destination. Do we not have choices and free will?

As we are seeking answers to our society’s existential questions, are our individual answers drowned out in our minds and spirits by the fight of our angels and demons, or can we dare to hear God’s voice call us anew, with “here I am, Lord!”—or will we minimize ourselves to say, as I did once, wondering if anything that can change the world can come out of where we are. Can anything good come out of Greenland? What do WE say about one another, our purpose here, and how we will renew ourselves in this and the next generation? Let me leave you with these final thoughts.

External examples are hard to come by these days. We find out all kinds of crazy stuff about who we once admired in history, and we no longer have tolerance to understand that we can understand that heroes, too, are all too human. We have to understand for both ourselves and others that we are all going to disappoint each other—remember when I said that on my first Sunday here? We’re lost. We grow afraid of many things, in our human frailty, and it’s one reason we end up here. In church. We seek peace for our hearts, compassion and mercy for our life together. We need guidance.

And what we find here, in church, in our disordered lives and discomforted selves, is one another. We find that we’re all befuddled and confused, and seeking the “right” path. We see this Jesus who is not just a Son of Man but a Son of Humanity, this intersection of God and Man who was right here, who tells us that deep inside, while we were still in the dark shadows of a fig tree, God saw us and called us into the light. We get an indication to those existential questions of, Who are we? Not just today, but who have we been? Who put us there? This is tough stuff, but if we are ever to move forward to a better future, we must face up honestly to our past, both individually and collectively. We judge others while giving ourselves a hall pass. We want to give ourselves the moon and the stars and yet tell others they should pull themselves up by their bootstraps. But God says otherwise. God calls us to live differently, and that success is measured differently in the Kingdom of God.

It is up to us to say yes to our better angels. To say yes to giving into the possibilities despite the doubts. And if we can be honest with where we’ve been, we can start to plot a future, with God’s grace, for all peoples who seek what we seek to enjoy as Christians—justice, mercy, compassion, kindness, charity, and love. Jesus calls us forth in these things he talks about over and over again. It’s a tall order for sure. So let’s make it about how we live, as well as about where we live. But together, we can dream again, and answer the question for today’s generation, “Who are we?”. Jesus is calling—how clear do we hear it, and how will we answer?

Thanks be to God, Amen.