

**THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST**



Who do you say that I am?

+

Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Alleluia.

JUBILATE

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands;*
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.

Know this: The Lord himself is God;*
he himself has made us and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise;*
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.

For the Lord is good;
his mercy is everlasting;*
and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

Psalm 124

Nisi quia Dominus

1 If the Lord had not been on our side, *
let Israel now say;
2 If the Lord had not been on our side, *
when enemies rose up against us;
3 Then would they have swallowed us up alive *
in their fierce anger toward us;
4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us *
and the torrent gone over us;
5 Then would the raging waters *
have gone right over us.
6 Blessed be the Lord! *
he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; *
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
8 Our help is in the Name of the Lord, *
the maker of heaven and earth.

THE LESSON

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him,

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

REFLECTION

by
Norm Wright

+ In the Name of Jesus +

Picking up where we left off last Sunday, Jesus and his disciples are still taking a tour of the region outside of Galilee. Leaving behind the region of the Canaanite woman near Tyre, Jesus and company headed east toward the city of Caesarea Philippi in what is modern day Syria. It is in this foreign land that Jesus asks his disciples the question, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

This story is also found in the Gospel of Mark, where the question Jesus asks is, “Who do people say the I am?” Mark’s account is void about the part of Jesus changing Simon’s name to Peter during this event.

Both stories agree, however, that Jesus had this conversation with his disciples in an area near Caesarea Philippi. Both Gospels agree on Jesus asking who people thought he was and asking the disciples who they thought he was. Both agree that it is Peter who declares Jesus to be the Messiah, and both agree that Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah at that time.

This story raises questions of its own: Why did Jesus wait to have this conversation outside of Galilee? Why does Jesus ask his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is” in Matthew’s account instead of “Who do people say that I am” recorded in Mark’s account? Why did Jesus warn his disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah?

If I were doing an exegetical class on this story, we could spend a good amount of time probing such questions which might tell us something about Jesus’ need to sojourn into territories beyond the Galilean border. We could explore why Jesus saw a need to ask those questions, why Matthew’s version of this story differs from that of Mark’s, and why Jesus sternly warns his disciples to say nothing about his being the Messiah to anyone. All of that is worth spending some time with, but not this morning.

The main point of this story in both Gospel accounts is clearly Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Beyond that, Matthew reads back into Mark’s more original telling (through Jesus’ voice) the fact that by the time Matthew is being written, the church is already established and Peter is considered its primary leader whose faith is seen as the bedrock upon which the church’s

authority of is derived. It is clear that identifying Jesus as the Messiah, meant one thing to Peter and another thing to Jesus, as we shall see in next Sunday's Gospel lesson. Matthew also makes it clear that what Peter uttered is something he really didn't understand, leading Jesus to say, "You didn't come up with this on your own. My Father revealed that to you."

What I would like to focus our attention on today is those two original questions that Jesus asked his disciples. They're not the same question. Considering them from the perspective of today's world, we could phrase them as: What are people saying about Jesus nowadays and how would you personally describe Jesus?

I think it safe to say if we were asked today, "Who do people say Jesus is?" Our first response wouldn't be John the Baptist, Elijah or the thought-provoking Jeremiah. After two thousand years and Jesus being known world-wide, the answers to that question, I suspect, would vary greatly: "Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is God, Jesus is the Savior, Jesus is True God and True man. Jesus is a prophet. Jesus is a great religious teacher. Jesus is the founder of Christianity. Jesus is charlatan, or Jesus is a fictional character; all things people claim Jesus to be.

While most would consider it is safe to mimic Peter's answer as the right answer to Jesus' second question, I think it also safe to say we could add to that; as in, "Jesus is my Lord, Jesus is my Savior, "Jesus is my friend " or "Jesus is my brother." Christian mystics often talked about Jesus in more intimate of terms as a lover; as in, the lover of my soul.

Before this pandemic caused us to discontinue worship services, some of us met to discuss our experiences with Jesus. We had a couple of interesting discussions about them, and I recall commenting then and in my reflections since then that what is true for Jesus is true for us and what is true about us is true about Jesus.

What struck me in rereading this story several times is when Jesus asked who do you say that I am, nobody stated the obvious, "You are Jesus." To me, that would have been an appropriate answer. Jesus has value in just being Jesus; just as you and I have value in being who we are. Mark and Matthew, however, were trying to explain to their audiences what they depicted Jesus explaining to his disciples what will become clear in next week's lesson, which is that Jesus was not here to fight against human flesh and blood but rather fight for the soul of humanity at the expense of his own flesh and blood. Jesus was called to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God to instill in our hearts the rule of love that would foment (stir up) compassion, forgiveness, understanding, and give birth to a new way of life.

Here we are, two thousand years later, still trying to make sense of Jesus in a world that continues to struggle with and, at times, struggles against what he taught, what he lived for, what he died for, and what raised him to new life.

Jesus literally had to take his disciples beyond their familiar turf to some place foreign to teach them something that was foreign to their thinking. Although Jesus is the Messiah, he was and is not the Messiah they thought the Messiah should be but rather the Messiah God called Jesus to be. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, God's ways are not our ways. [Isaiah 55:8].

Throughout the history of the Church, questions, such as Jesus asked his disciples, would have been and even be today in some denominations might be considered toying with heresy. I grew up in a religious environment that discouraged questions and encouraged bypassing my inquiring mind and sticking with what I was taught. The questions I was allowed to ask were the questions the church gave me in catechism classes, but they didn't encourage me to ask any that would have crossed my mind. I never heard a pastor say, "Do you have any questions?"

Jesus knew the value of and the need for questions. In the domain of religion, the questions are more important than the answers we find because the Word of God is a Living Word, a Word that meets us where we are at today in order to give us insight into the questions of today.

At times, Jesus leads us into unfamiliar turf; to places where we are prodded to examine what we think about Jesus collectively and re-examine our personal experiences and relationships with Jesus. So I invite all of us to take some time today and think about how you would answer Jesus' questions and don't be afraid to ask Jesus a few questions of your own.

* * * * *

Jesus, lover of our souls, prod us towards a deeper, heartfelt experience of you. Create in us inquiring minds and help us to question boldly and discern wisely. Gently guide us to those foreign places in our lives where we may come to know ourselves better in the light of your love. Amen.



*Jesus, lover of my soul, Let me to thy bosom fly.
While the near waters roll, While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Savior hide, Till the storm of life be past;
Safe into the haven guide, O receive my soul at last.*

*Other refuge have I none, Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah! Leave me not alone, Still support and comfort me
All my trust on thee is stayed; All my help from thee I bring:
Cover my defenseless head With the shadow of thy wing.*



*Plenteous grace with thee is found, Grace to cleanse from every sin;
Let the healing streams abound, Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art, Freely let me take of thee:
Spring thou up within my heart, Rise to all eternity.*

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of Love, we pray for the whole Church and our parish family. Guide your Church and this parish in the way of truth and love.

God of Healing, we pray for Bernard, Sue, Pat, Bev Ann, Dan, Jolene, Katrine, Gladys Onsted and family, and for those we hold in our hearts. Grant unto them and to all in need the comfort and healing of your presence.

God of Joy, we pray for those celebrating birthdays: Bobbie Kleinschmit (August 28) and for those celebrating anniversaries: Dick and Dawne Unruh (August 26) May they find joy, happiness, and fulfillment in the coming year.

God our Protector, we pray for those affected by Covid-19; for healthcare workers around the world; for those who provide essential services; for the leaders of all nations, for all government officials every where, and for all those making decisions in this time of crisis. Grant them protection and guide those in authority to make wise decisions.

God our Defender, we pray for the homeless and the jobless in our nation, and for those who have lost their homeland, their sense of security, and who find themselves dependent on the good will of others in strange lands; that their needs are met and grant them the comfort of your Holy Spirit.

God of Life, we pray for those who have died. On this Sunday we pray for Doug Larson. May he and all the departed find life in you.

God of Mission, we pray for guidance in discerning our mission in enlarging the Family of Faith in our midst.

THE PRAYER FOR MISSION

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near; Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nation into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



**MAY THE LORD BLESS US AND KEEP US.
MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON US AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO
US.
MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON US AND GIVE US PEACE.
AMEN**

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