

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA  
Proper 16, Year A, August 27, 2017  
The Rev. Bill Queen  
“Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”  
Matthew 16:13-20

one of the best ways to find meaning and connection in a Bible passage is to put yourself into the story; to use your imagination to put yourself in as one of the people; for instance, in today’s gospel story, to imagine yourself to be one of the people to whom Jesus is speaking; Jesus—however you want to picture him—asks you this question, “Who do you say that I am?”; it’s a seemingly simple question; Peter has an answer right off the bat: “You are the Messiah”; yet that is Peter’s answer; that’s not necessarily my answer or your answer; and even believing that Jesus is the Messiah, doesn’t make that answer the best answer for us

so in order to help each of us consider how to answer that question for ourselves, in our own way, I want to break it down into its simple pieces, and look at each part of it as a separate question: who? / do? / you? / say? / I am?

who?; who is Jesus?; there are plenty of good answers from Scripture, from the prayer book, from theological and popular Christian writers; but is there an answer that personally relates who Jesus is to you?; is he a person to you?; is he a presence to you?; is he a path, a way of life, to you?; just who would you say he is, in your own words, if someone were to ask?; because what you, from your personal experience, have come to know of who Jesus is, is an extremely powerful thing to express; no one can argue against what you yourself have experienced of Jesus; there can be no more powerful statement of faith than who you yourself know Jesus to be

and, unfortunately, it is now very important for us to say who we understand Jesus to be, because there are many people out there who are willing to say who they think Jesus is, but who present him in ways that are unrecognizable, that don’t look like the Jesus of scripture, or that don’t look like Jesus as we in this church community have come to experience him

do?; do we ever actually share with other people who we believe Jesus is?; or do we avoid the subject entirely?; do we wait to be asked?; or do we seek out

opportunities to share our faith and our understanding of who Jesus is with someone who is not sure or who does not know?

if we actually believe that knowing Jesus makes a difference in our own life, why wouldn't we want to share that knowledge with others, so that they too could experience a difference in their lives?; can there be anything more important that we would want to share with someone else than a life-changing recognition about who Jesus is?; I don't believe there is

you?; many people believe that telling people about Jesus is someone else's job: clergy, church employees, Sunday School teachers, missionaries, or others who act in some official capacity for a church or other religious organization; in reality, telling people about Jesus is every Christian's job; there are so many people who, even if they have heard about Jesus, still do not know what it means to live in relationship with him; it takes Christian businessmen and businesswomen to share their faith in a meaningful way with other business people; it takes Christian retirees to share their faith in a meaningful way with other retirees; it takes Christian college students to share their faith in a meaningful way with other college students; it takes educated Christians to share their faith in a meaningful way with other educated people; and so on for every imaginable type of person and personality, in any family, any workplace, or any place of recreation; anywhere you go there will be people who do not know who Jesus is; it takes people who speak the same language—and I don't mean a foreign language—but speak understandable words, from the same frame of mind, and from a perspective they share; it takes people who have shared the same experiences in life to be able to speak about something so deeply felt and experienced, and to make it understandable in a meaningful way to others

you may be the only Christian to cross paths with and have the opportunity to share your faith with a person who may need to learn about Jesus, even if they may not really want to; would you recognize that opportunity if it presented itself, and be ready to act on it?

say?; I often hear people say that they would rather show their faith than talk about it, but the risk of misinterpretation is always great if we only show our faith without any saying to accompany it; many good people do good things, motivated by all kinds of good reasons; but if Christian faith is your reason, why not be explicit in such a way that no one can be mistaken about your

motivations?

the Epistle of James reminds us to be “doers of the word” (1:22); that reminds us that the most effective witness to faith is to do what is stated in our Baptismal Covenant as proclaiming “by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;” that means to show it and say it, to walk the walk and talk the talk together, leaving no room for anyone to misread why we lead our lives the way we do

I am?; notice the question is not who was I?, who was Jesus?, in the past tense—which in some practical ways is almost inconsequential; who Jesus is, right now, is a far more important question; the implication of the present tense being that Jesus is, now, acting, influencing, guiding, challenging, empowering, protecting, loving, and being present in us and to us, in others, and in the world about us, right now

and the fact that Jesus is asking us, in the first person, means that he is pressing the question upon you, upon me, upon every person; “who am I—to you?” Jesus is asking; he is present with us, in each of our lives, among us in this church, and in our surrounding community; so how can each of us witness to that by actually saying who Jesus is, to us, right now?

on the one hand these might seem like simple, or even simplistic questions; but on the other hand they are questions with profound consequences—for us, and for the world around us; the way we answer these questions can make a big difference, for us, and for those with whom we share our faith

my hope and prayer is that we are already prepared to—or if not ready, to be learning to—answer them as quickly, as convincingly, and with the same credibility as Peter did; our answers to these simple questions do much to determine our relationship with God in Christ and may very well lead others into that important relationship too; put yourself into that Bible story; imagine that Jesus is asking you, right now, “Who do you say that I am?”; who will you say that he is?