

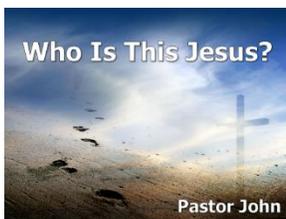
Who Is This Jesus?

February 12, 2017

Matthew 16: 13-20

¹³ When Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, "What do people say about the Son of Man?" ¹⁴ The disciples answered, "Some people say you are John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet." ¹⁵ Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter spoke up, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus told him: Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed! You didn't discover this on your own. It was shown to you by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ So I will call you Peter, which means "a rock." On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and God in heaven will allow whatever you allow on earth. But he will not allow anything that you don't allow. ²⁰ Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.



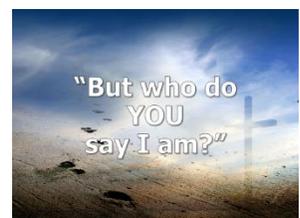
Who IS this Jesus? We have been looking at prayer and the power of prayer in our lives and in our church over the course of the last five weeks. During the next three weeks, we will begin to transition towards Lent as we will look at Jesus, His life, and at the example that He set for us. This week, we will look at the question, 'who is this Jesus?'. Let us pray.

To begin this process, please open your bulletin to the page with the 11:00 order of worship on it. You will find a box there. In that box, please put one word that says who Jesus is to you. Please write just one word in the box. I'll give you a moment... Thank you.

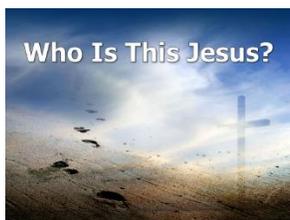
During our Tuesday morning men's group, one of the men said, "There is a storm coming. It will be here before we know it." He was speaking of something pretty specific and while there is value in seeing the bigger picture, I think there is also great value in living with this belief in our day to day life. It is when we live 'on the edge', so to speak, that we live life fully trusting in Christ and in relationship with Christ. It is not to say that we need to live lives that are anxious or full of worry. It is to say that we need to live lives that rest in Christ, to live lives that begin and end each day living with Christ as our guide and the source of our strength.



In our passage today, we see Jesus sort of testing the waters. He poses this question to his disciples: "*What do people say about the Son of Man?*" as a way to begin the conversation that He really wants to have. Jesus begins with a general question to get the disciples thinking. They do okay with their answers – people are saying the Jesus is maybe John the Baptist, maybe Elijah, maybe Jeremiah, or maybe some other prophet. But then He shifts the line of his questioning and gets right to the point: "*But who do YOU say I am?*" – Jesus is direct and to the point.



There is no ducking the question either. Sometimes in life that is good. Sometimes when we are backed into a corner, when we are forced to make a decision, to commit to something, to really state where we stand – it is a good thing. Please look at the box in your bulletin. What one word did you write in that box? Who do YOU say that Jesus is? Please do me a favor – glance over at your neighbor’s bulletin. Don’t read the word, just make sure there is a word written in the box. If not, give them a little nod, encourage them to answer the question: one word that says who Jesus is to them.



Why did Jesus pose this question to His disciples? Why do I pose this question to you? Well, we will all face storms in our lives. We will all face trials in our lives. We will all be tossed about by life from time to time. I think Jesus knew that the disciples would soon face storms, trials, persecution, and even death. Jesus wanted to begin to prepare them, so He asked for their answer to the question: “*But who do YOU say I am?*” And really, He asks us the same question, doesn’t He? So, people of Winner United Methodist Church, who is Jesus to you? [Write answers on white board.]

When you pray to God, do you pray to this Jesus? When you pray, do you pray believing that an answer will come? When you confess your sins to God or to Jesus, do you pray confessing your sins and admitting your guilt? When you confess and acknowledge your guilt, do you then repent and express your desire to live a more righteous and holy life? The answers to these questions are all

part of who we really “say” Jesus is. We may not say it with words, but we speak volumes in our prayers and in how we live our lives.

To further expand this idea of ‘who’ Jesus is, please take a moment and think about all the stories you know about Jesus. Think about all the parables and teachings and healings and encounters that Jesus had in the gospels. Now think about your word in the box in your bulletin and about these words up here on the board. Does your word fit with who you know Jesus to be in the Bible? Do these words fit with who we know Jesus to be in the Bible? And, more importantly, do these words fit with the Jesus people see in your life?

Now, when I think about Jesus in the gospels, I think of the word “love”.

Whether it was in a parable, whether it was in a teaching, whether it was in a healing, or whether it was in an encounter, love was Jesus’ first thought. To me, love was what guided Jesus - no matter who He met, no matter who



He crossed paths with, no matter who came to confront or accuse Him, no matter who put Him on a cross, no matter what – it was love that guided Jesus. When a teacher of the Law asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus responded with two commandments that both had ‘love’ at their core. Jesus named loving God and loving neighbor as the two greatest commands. Now I do not mean to say that ‘love’ is the only *right* answer – it is one of many correct answers. Of course, all of these are good answers to ‘who’ Jesus is. But if I had to pick just one, love would be my choice. Most days.

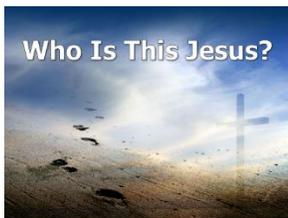
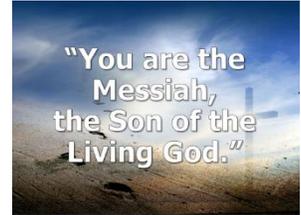
When we think about all of the people who come to Jesus in the gospels, almost all of them come because they are in the midst of a storm or a trial or because they are wrestling with some question of faith. If we wanted to answer who these people would say Jesus is, we need to begin with why they came to Jesus. In this, we will see who they thought Jesus was, much as we do when we look at how we pray and at how we live out our lives. For all who came to see Jesus in the New Testament, some people's response to why they came to Jesus would have been to remove doubt or fear or pain or grief. Some people's answer to why they came to Jesus would be for insights into their questions of faith. For others, they were seekers, wanting to know how to live their lives in ways that are pleasing God. And then, of course, there were those few who came to trap Jesus, to prove who Jesus was not. This group is for another day and time.

For those who came to Jesus seeking relief from doubt or fear or pain or grief, they would likely say Jesus is hope or assurance or healing or comfort. For those who came to Jesus seeking answers to their questions of faith or how to live their lives to please God, they would probably say Jesus is truth or light. At times in my life, I would say that Jesus is hope or healing or truth. At other times, I would say that Jesus is assurance or comfort or light. At different times in your life, hasn't your answer to *'who this Jesus is'* changed according to where you were in life?



So when we begin to try and answer Jesus' question, "*But who do YOU say I am?*", there are really a number of possible answers. This screen and white

board show just some of the possible answers. When we turn back to our scripture for today, we see one possible answer and it is a pretty good answer. Ever the one to open his mouth and blurt something out, ever the one to jump out of the boat or to draw the sword, Peter pipes up. Reading again from verse sixteen, "*Simon Peter spoke up, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*" The Messiah, the one who came to save God's people, to bring salvation to all of humanity, to break the grip of sin and death on people's lives. Jesus, the Messiah. The Son of the living God, the embodiment of God in the flesh, the beginning and the end, the one who sits upon the throne, the creator of all things, the omnipresent and omnipotent one. Who is this Jesus? He is the one who can do all things, the one who knows all things, the one who is all-loving and always forgiving. Jesus is all things good and true and righteous and holy.



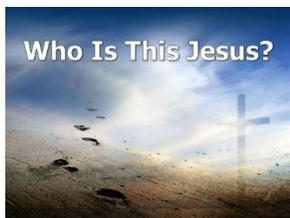
Of course, Jesus likes Peter's answer. It is the truth. It is a great answer. It is an answer that draws praise from Jesus as He says to Peter, "*You are blessed!*" And it is also an answer that came to Peter from God. So Jesus goes on, in verse seventeen, acknowledging this by saying, "*You didn't discover this on your own. It was shown to you by my Father in heaven.*" When we each answer the question of who this Jesus is, we too have been shown the answer by God. It is through our lives, through our experiences, through our encounters with the living God that we too come to know who Jesus is.

As you look back over the course of your life, you can probably identify many people, events, and experiences that help you define who Jesus is and that help you to answer this question. For most of us, we have had different experiences and encounters with Jesus and could, in fact, give several answers to the question, 'Who is this Jesus?' – depending on when the question was asked.

If you look at the board, many of you can share a time when Jesus was a friend, a redeemer, a comforter, and so on. This is a good thing because as the number of our answers to this question grows, so too does the depth of our relationship with Jesus. It is part of our journey of faith. The more we know Jesus, the closer we become to Him; the closer we become to Jesus, the more we are transformed into His image; and, the more we are transformed into His image, the better we represent Jesus in our lives. It is when we live our lives as a witness to Christ's love and light and truth, that others come to see Jesus in and through us.



Karl Barth, a famous theologian, was on a streetcar one day in Basel, Switzerland, where he lectured. A tourist to the city climbed on and sat down next to Barth. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired. "Yes," said the tourist. "Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth. "Yes; he said, "I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well, as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning." The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted. He went back to his hotel saying to himself, "I met Karl Barth's barber today."



This is a cute story. But it contains a lesson for us as well.

We are called to be Jesus' hands and feet, to be salt and light in the world, to live with Christ in our heart. When someone looks at our lives, they should see and feel the answer to the question, "*Who is this Jesus?*" So rather than someone spending time with us on a streetcar or at work or at the gym, and afterward saying they met a follower of Christ today, we should strive for people to say that they met Christ in and through us that day. Winner United Methodist Church, it is us and it is our lives that need to be the answer to the question, "*Who is this Jesus?*" May it be today and every day. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Look at the word you put in the box. Do you still agree with your choice? Would you like to change it? If so, what one word would you use?
- 2) If you were there that day, how would you answer Jesus as He looked at you and asked, "But who do YOU say I am"?
- 3) If a stranger were to follow you from afar for a few days, who would people say Jesus is after observing you?
- 4) What changes do you need to make in your life to be a better model of who Jesus is? Pray for God's help to make these changes.