

Who Do You Say that I Am?

Sterling UMC
August 21, 2011
Matthew 16:13-20

There are some things in this life that are truly important and some things that really don't amount to a hill of beans. We seem to get caught up in trying to find answers to questions that when all is said and done are really not going to make any difference. We have an odd fascination for the trivial. What team is going to win the Monday night football game? What happened on my favorite soap opera last week? What am I going to eat for dinner today? Should I buy the red car or the blue car? But what is of ultimate significance? What really matters in this life? What are the questions we should be trying to answer in our lives?

One day, Jesus cut through all the fluff and put his disciples on the spot. "Who do the crowds say that I am?" he asked them. "What are they saying about me?"

He knew who he was. He knew whose he was. He knew what he was about.

"Some say John the Baptist," one of them answered. "Others say Elijah," another responded. "Still others say that you are one of the prophets of long ago who has come back to life." Then Jesus turned the magnifying glass directly on them as he pointed the question directly at them.

"But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"
Who is Jesus Christ?

The question is, this morning, how do we respond? We cannot go away unaffected by the person and the message of Jesus Christ. He demands a response.

Who is Jesus Christ? If you asked a hundred people you would probably get a hundred different answers. If you asked your average person on the street though, I'm afraid there might be some answers that we wouldn't want to hear.

Many people have a positive regard for Jesus, but they miss the mark altogether. I mean, you can speak of Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, teacher or spiritual leader, and few will object. But speak of Him as the Son of God, Savior from sin, the only way to Heaven, and multitudes of people will line up to voice their disapproval.

A billion Muslims will say: "Prophet, yes. God, no!" Jews scattered across the world will say: "Teacher, yes. Messiah, no!" Liberal "theologians" and other humanists will exclaim: "Exemplary man, yes! Great example, yes! Divine Son of God, Savior from Sin? No Way!!"

Saying Jesus is a prophet, teacher, or a good example are all nice things to say about Him. They are all positive remarks. But if that is the extent of their answer then the answer is wrong. The people of Jesus time got it wrong. So often the people of our day get it wrong. They do not understand, nor do they

confess who Jesus really is. So, what is the correct answer? Who is this man Jesus?

We find the answer in today's text. Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say I am?"

Now please understand, no one on the planet at that time was more qualified to answer that question than these people. After all, unlike the multitudes, these guys had been with Jesus 24-7 for two and a half years. They had heard Him teach. They'd seen all His miracles. I mean, they were *the* star witnesses of Jesus' life up until that point. Over the past 2.5 years at times He had shocked them. At times He thrilled them. At other times He filled them with awe and wonder. Remember? The things He said and did led them to whisper to each other, "*What manner of man is this!?*" Well the time had come for them to confess their opinion as to what manner of man He was. I mean it was time to fish or cut bait; it was time for them to take a personal stand. So Jesus looked each of His students in the eye and asked this all-important question which prompted Peter's famous bold response.

Now, I'd like you to come back to the present. I mean, leave your mental visit to the Galilean hills and return to 304 E. Church Rd, August 21, 2011, because I'd like each of you to consider what you would say if Jesus were to ask you this question right here and now. I would remind you that as 1 Peter 3:15 says that we are always to "*...be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*" We all should be always ready to answer this all-important question. And we have no excuse for not being ready, for, after all, not only have we read of Jesus' miracles and His teaching, the things His first disciples experienced, recorded in the Bible, as Christians we have each walked with Jesus, we've personally experienced His love, His presence, His guidance, His wonder-working power in our own lives. So let me ask you, "*Who do YOU say Jesus is? In your opinion, Who is Jesus Christ?*" And, remember, Jesus doesn't care about public opinion on this issue. He only cares about YOUR opinion. He wants an answer from YOU on this.

Christian faith goes beyond knowing what others believe or what others say about Jesus. It is not enough to know what others know about Jesus. It's not enough to understand in your mind what someone has taught you about his nature. It doesn't matter what someone else may say about Jesus; you must know, understand, and accept for yourself that he is the Christ, the Messiah. It requires us to hold beliefs for ourselves. He wants us to take a stand. You must move from curiosity to commitment, from admiration to adoration.

This morning take a look at the cross. Listen to his own words. Jesus has revealed himself to us. He has done all that needs doing. He who has eyes let them see. He who has ears let them hear. You who don't believe touch the nail prints in his hands and feet. Put your hand in his side. Listen as he asks you that same question he asked his disciples long ago, "Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am?"

You see in the long run of things, it is not what the world says about Jesus that matters. It doesn't matter what some professors teaches. It doesn't matter what any theologian writes. It doesn't matter what I say. It doesn't matter what

your mother or your father believes. It doesn't matter what your husband or your wife, or your best friend says. It doesn't matter what the person sitting next to you in this church this morning says. It is what you say that counts. Jesus asks, who do YOU say that I am?

The world wants to know our testimony. There are people out there that desperately need to see and hear what you believe.

Is he the bread of life that nourishes your soul? Is he the Light that guides your life? Is he the door through which you have entered? Is he your Good Shepherd? Is he the one through whom you conquer even death? Is he your source of true and abiding happiness? Is he the one who is enabling you to bear fruit? Is he your Savior? Is he your Master? Is he your Friend? Is he your Lord? Has Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?

Some would tell us that Jesus' earthly life was not very important. They say he wrote no books, composed no songs, drew no pictures, carved no statues, amassed no fortune, commanded no army, ruled no nation. And yet we know that Jesus spoke as never man had spoken, and lived and healed and died, as never man had done.

He who never wrote a line has been made the hero of unnumbered volumes. He who never drew a sketch has been the inspiration of some of the finest paintings put on canvas. He who never carved in stone has lived to be the architect of the world's most beautiful cathedrals. He who never wrote a song has put music into the hearts of nameless multitudes. He who never established an institution is the foundation of the church that bears his name. He who refused the kingdoms of this world has become the Lord of millions. He who never wove a napkin has been woven into our Western civilization. Yes, he whose shameful death scarcely produced a ripple on the pool of history in his day has become a mighty current in the vast ocean of the centuries since he died.

He was so winsome that children loved him, so gentle that women were comforted by him, so manly that rough people took notice of him, so compassionate that the multitudes pressed upon him, so courageous that the powers of entrenched evil trembled before him, so pure that sinners saw God in him, so faithful that he went up that lonely heartbreaking road to the cross, and so triumphant that twenty-one centuries after his earthly life was spent his cross still stands as "sovereign emblem over all."

His name is Jesus. And he desires to close the fissure in our lives. He wants to heal our brokenness. There is a man on a cross smiling down even through his agony and sorrow who wants to forgive our sins, release us from resentment, cleanse us from unrighteousness, and heal us and make us whole. His name is Jesus, and today he wants to know, "Who do you say that I am?"

Prayer:

Invitation:

As I said earlier, this final question is one that we all must answer individually, because becoming a Christian is a personal experience. In Romans 10:9-10 Paul

put it this way: *“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”* And we must carefully consider how we will reply because this is the ultimate question of life. How we answer determines so much: our relationship to God, our capacity to experience real, abundant life, our character and our conduct, our capacity to truly love, our courage in the face of death, not to mention where we will spend eternity.

So, have you answered correctly?

Have you confessed with your mouth and believed in your heart that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God?

If you haven't then do so—right now—and in a moment come and tell me. Make your confession a public one just like Peter did.

And then, you who have already answered this question correctly, I would ask you, is God calling you to serve Him here in this church? If so, won't you come and join our fellowship?

We stand and sing to give you an opportunity to make public decisions like these. Won't you come now as God leads?