



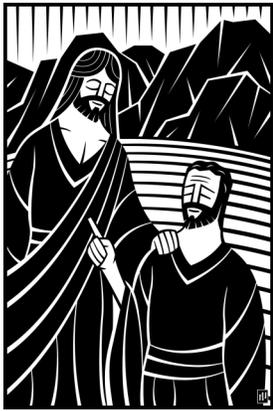
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 14, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Matthew 16:13-20

## WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?



At the beginning of our text for this morning Jesus asks a question of his disciples. It's a simple question yet an important one. It's a question asked first of other people, then of the disciples themselves. It's a question that has a lot weighing in the balance. It's a question that we would do well to ask ourselves too. "Who do you say Jesus is?"

Jesus first asked the question about others. "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'" The disciples gave a plethora of answers, didn't they? "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" If Jesus came and asked us the same question, how would you answer him? "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" I'm guessing that you probably wouldn't have to think very hard before a plethora of answers from your own experience fly into your head. Perhaps you've heard people's opinions about Jesus when you've tried to tell them about their Savior, or you've read for yourselves other religion's views on Jesus, or heard about them from a fellow member or from Bible Class.

Some people say Jesus is a great prophet who had a lot of good things to teach us about living with other people. Just read the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7. Jesus preached a sermon to believers on what the life of a believer looks like. There's a ton of practical application there that people from every religion in the world have taken as sound advice. Jesus said a lot of good things. Other people might take it a step further and acknowledge that Jesus did things that other people couldn't. He started a movement so large that it swept throughout the known world and continues even up till today. Some will go so far as to acknowledge that Jesus is more than human, that he is a savior, that

he is a demi-god, that he is even a divinely gifted being.

There's no doubt about it, there are a plethora of ideas out there concerning Jesus, today just like in his own day. In fact, the truth of the matter is, everyone must have something to say about Jesus. The opinions can be good or bad, positive or negative, but everyone has something to say about him. There are the skeptics and those who are against Jesus, those who would call him a liar or a hoax, and also those who would shower him with praise as a great man. But no matter who you are, no matter what religion you have (even if you have no religion at all) everyone has to have something to say about Jesus. That's the very nature of the Gospel, isn't it? When the Good News of sins forgiven in Christ is proclaimed people always have a reaction to it, you cannot remain neutral. "Who do people say Jesus is?" The answers could fill however much time you want to devote to the discussion.

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Jesus, being true God, already knew what every person out there said about him. He knew the rumors. He knew the theories. He knew the discussions. He even knew what the enemies said. But what he was really interested in with the whole topic was his disciples' opinion on the matter. "What do you think," he asks them. And of course no sooner had Jesus asked the question had Simon Peter opened his mouth to speak, and what a confession he made! "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Now that's a confession that you could build on. That's a confession that takes a stand. That's a confession that proclaims the Gospel, the very good news that God kept his promise to send a Savior from all sin for all time. Now that's a confession that creates faith in hearts of believers.

Where in the world did Peter come up with such a confession like that? "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'" A lot of people, a lot of men, a lot of flesh and blood, as the text literally says, have an opinion about Jesus and about who he is.

Unfortunately there were times when the disciples listened to the reports of the flesh and blood around them rather than to the living Word of God that came from the Father through Jesus Christ. How slow they were to understand and to believe at times. How slow they were to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. How slow they were to believe that he came as the spiritual Savior from sin, and not as a physical savior from Rome. How slow they were to recognize all that Jesus could and had done: feeding 5,000 people with 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread, calming storms, healing the sick, raising the dead. How often the disciples let the flesh and blood around them, the people around them, affect the way they looked at their Savior.

How about you? Who do you say Jesus is? There are a lot of opinions out there, and they affect us too. Can Jesus really be all that he promised to be? Can he really give me his true body and blood in the Lord's Supper? Can such a supper really forgive sins? Can he really wash away the sin of a baby at baptism? Can the words of forgiveness spoken by a pastor, a mere man, really be binding in heaven to assure me that my sin is going to be forgiven before the Lord and God and Creator of all things when I stand in judgment at the end of time? Can the Son of Man really save me from death itself, from the gates of Hell, and from the enemies that surround me every day? Can this book really be God's Word and promises, and not man's made up story? Jesus can't really do any of those things ***IF*** he is just a great prophet, or just a man, or just someone who has a lot of wise words to say, or just even a demi-god or a powerful angel. If that's all Jesus is then the Church was built on nothing. And too often that perspective of Jesus whittles away at my faith too.

Thanks be to God that Jesus is so much more! He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! In Peter's confession about Jesus he was pinning all of the hopes and dreams in the promises of God about *the Anointed One* foretold in the Old Testament on Jesus. In others words, Peter was saying, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the promised Messiah who was to come. You are the Son of David who saves! You are the Prophet foretold by Moses who would come from our own people to save us from our sins. You are the Christ. You are the Son of the Living God!" That's exactly what Jesus is. He is the Son of God!

Did you notice that Jesus gave himself once again

that name "Son of Man," and yet Peter calls him the Son of God! What a proclamation of who Jesus really is! He is the God-man. He is Immanuel, which means God with us. He is the promised Savior, the Lord of all who gave his life for you and for me. In Jesus' original question we see already Jesus' plan and purpose for coming. The Son of Man came to save people, to save the very people who were talking about him. So too today. Jesus came to save

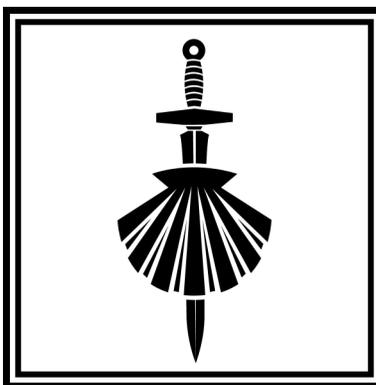


the people who hold those opinions about him. He is the Son of Man, and he came to save mankind. And we get to proclaim him to them.

He is also the Son of God. Jesus is the bridge across the gulf between sinners and a holy God. Jesus is God the Father's clearest expression of his love to us because in Jesus, true God, we have one who was sacrificed once for all, for all sin of all time. In Jesus we have revealed to us—revealed not by flesh and blood, but

by God the Father himself through his Word—we have revealed to us how sin is forgiven. It's forgiven on the cross where we see a holy God punish his one and only Son instead of punishing the sinner. And that's the forgiveness that he gave to us to proclaim to each other and to the world.

Jesus' reply to Peter is given to the Church to proclaim to sinners. "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" Jesus recognized in Peter and in his answer to his question that something had changed. That something was that Peter became a believer, that the Word and promises of God which were spoken to him took root in his heart and created faith there. The Holy Spirit revealed to Peter through the Word that Jesus was



the Christ, the Son of the living God. That meant that Peter's sins were forgiven once for all by the sacrifice that Jesus goes on to tell his disciples about in the next section. The sacrifice Jesus made later was the reason that his Word could be proclaimed to the world, to bring people to faith. And that proclamation of the Word, the basis for the Church, will prevail even against hell itself. Not the gates of hell, not Satan the Accuser, not the sinful world, not the sinful nature, no nothing in all

creation can stand up to the simple gospel message that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Savior of all the world from sin.

The proclamation of the Word works. It worked in Peter as the foundation, the cornerstone of his faith. And it is the foundation and cornerstone of ours as well. Jesus gave to Peter, just as he gives to all believers, the keys to heaven. He gave the church the power, and also the responsibility, to proclaim to the world the truth of what God says. God said your sins are forgiven. God says it to you every Sunday morning at church, every time you remember your baptism, every time you come forward for the Lord's Supper and receive the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. These keys are yours. Jesus made that clear also in Matthew chapter 18 when he said again, this time to all the disciples, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." In John 20:21-23, Jesus again gave his Church the keys and the power to forgive sins because of what he has done for us on the cross. "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with

you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'"

This is what we call the ministry of the Gospel. It's the gift that God gave to us all, and that gift was to proclaim the good news of a Savior from sin to the ends of the world. You hear it when you hear God's Word, and now you can share it with those that you tell about Jesus. You have the keys. Jesus gave them to you. You use them every time you tell someone that Jesus died for the forgiveness of their sins.

Who is Jesus? Now that's a loaded question, isn't it? It's a question that knows the spectrum of answers that will be given back. It's a question that begs more than just a simple answer. It's a question that shows us the true love of God. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of all the world, the foundation of the Church, the basis for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is life itself. Not even death can overcome that. Amen.

