

“Who is Jesus?”

Matthew 16:13-19 and Romans 12:1-8

(The scripture readings are within the sermon)

Pastor James York

August 21, 2011

North Presbyterian Church

Matthew 16:13-15 “When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” Jesus pressed them, “And how about you? Who do you say I am?”

Who is Jesus? Everyone has an opinion. Read the gospels and you will find a myriad of names for Jesus and a wide variety of descriptions. People have things to say about Jesus theologically, historically, sociologically, pastorally, politically and biblically. You can find people’s answers, on the web to books, from the dinner table to the street corner. Who is Jesus? Artists have interpreted Jesus in all sorts of ways? Jesus is often depicted as a beautiful, fit, white, Anglican, however his skin was likely dark. No where in the Bible or in history can we find a physical description of Jesus, perhaps because what really touched people was his spiritually presence, his love, peace, joy, compassion. Artist depict these qualities in varies ways. What people say about Jesus influences us. How people live for Jesus shapes us. God often speaks to us through others.

Who is Jesus? Jesus pressed them. Jesus asked them to make the move from what people say...to what you say about Jesus. How can you make that move from taking bits and pieces from what other people say about Jesus to answering for yourself who is Jesus for you?

Maybe the move is helped by knowledge, maybe by spiritual formation, by practices, through service. Maybe we discover who Jesus is through worship.

Our scripture reveals ultimately that the answer comes from within, from really listening to God. **Matthew 16:15-17** “Jesus pressed them, “And how about you? Who do you say I am?” **Simon Peter said, “You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus came back, “God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God, let you in on this secret of who I really am.”** Another translation interprets Jesus words as “**Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.**”

Anna Carter Florence says, “I think Peter is right because he sets aside what people say and listens to what God is unfolding in his soul, Peter allows God to tell him who Jesus is and then Peter confesses it. Blessed are you, Simon! Says Jesus; no human being could have told you that! You must really be listening! For each of us, Anna says, the moment comes when what people say about Jesus is no longer enough. We can’t hide behind it; we can’t pretend it’s ours. We can’t substitute what people say for what we say. We have to listen closely to God and speak up for ourselves.”

This is what we strive to do in our confirmation ministry. We share with our youth what scriptures says about Jesus, what others, our denomination, what I say about Jesus then we ask them to pray and write their personal statement of faith, to confess who is Jesus to them personally.

Really listening to God to hear the answer to who Jesus is for you personally is so very important. I should stop the sermon right here and let all of us really listen to God and share the answer.

Do you think Peter answered quickly or was there a long silence? Jesus did not say anything until Peter answered. St. Augustine says, "Our Lord wishes to reveal who Jesus is..." **Matthew 16:16 "Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** Peter's answer places the role of Messiah within the reign of God apart from any nationalistic or militaristic connotations. Donald Armentrout writes "Here for once Peter gets it right. 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' You are very God of very God, you are God on earth in human flesh. You are not just a representative of God, but you are God with us, God in our midst, God present with us in the flesh of Jesus Christ—and now God with us in bread, juice, water and the Word. And we must remember that flesh and blood has not revealed this to us; we did not figure this out—this is not a conclusion that we have reached because we are so smart. This has been revealed to us, disclosed to us, shown to us, given from outside of ourselves. Peter's confession was not the discovery of human insight, but a revelation of God. This revelation is given only to those humble enough to confess a crucified Lord, only to those who know that God loves to work through little things"

Please make time to answer, who is Jesus and write it down. I think Jesus waited for each disciple to answer and then Jesus had a unique blessing for each disciple. Jesus is asking you today, who am I and when you answer Jesus from your heart you will receive a unique blessing. Scripture only shares Jesus blessing to Peter. **Matthew 16:17 "Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are."** When you answer who Jesus is you discover who you are, so I really hope you will make time to answer who is Jesus and write it down in a journal and keep asking and answering that question and reading and rereading your answers over the years. So often we struggle to discover who we are because we start with ourselves rather than starting with God. First answer who is Jesus then God will reveal who you are. Since God made us all unique the answer is unique to all of us however we can learn a lot from Jesus answer to Peter. Jesus continues, **Matthew 16:18-20 "You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. "And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven."**

Certainly Peter, on his own, did not have the characteristics of a rock to build anything upon. Peter's many weaknesses were striking. Peter was impulsive, fearful, arrogant, quick to get angry and often lost his focus. Yet Peter was bold enough to sweep aside all the swirling answers regarding Jesus and really look at Jesus. Peter really listened to God to understand who Jesus is. It seems that is why Jesus built his church upon Peter. Peter's answer opens the realm of heaven to others in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who locked people out with their rigid, limited answers.

When Peter perceived who God is he understood who he was a person gifted in helping others really listen to God, a person able to unlock people's perception to experience God. A person who could help others answer for themselves who is Jesus which brings more and more of God's blessings from heaven to earth. This established a community focused on Jesus, filled with the power of God, revealing that Christ love and life will triumph. Our calling is to not lock up God's grace and blessings rather to unlock them to share God's grace and blessings with everyone.

What keys is Jesus giving to you? How does your life set yourself and others free to love and live abundantly? What is God building upon you? What is your legacy? How are you blessing others? We are Jesus witnesses called to proclaim with our lives who Jesus is?

The apostle Paul answers the question, who Jesus is, for himself in letter after letter, in run on sentences in long winded complex chapter after chapter. For the Apostle Paul God's grace through Jesus is so amazing, so powerful, so transformative no matter how hard he tries he just can't

fully explain it. Finally after eleven chapters in Romans Paul writes, **Romans 12:1-2** **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.”** Be a living sacrifice. Sacrifice means to make holy. It means to let go of what others say about Jesus. Let go of your burdens and baggage and you will find Jesus and discover yourself and how to live.

A spiritual Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil – it is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is God – it is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

What you feed you mind effects your ability to perceive God which effects what kind of person you will become. The apostle Paul continues **Romans 12:1-8** **“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what God does for us, not by what we are and what we do for God. In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of Jesus' body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.”**

Understanding who Jesus is reveals; who you are, enables you to feed the good wolf within you and transforms you into a holy living sacrifice so you can receive gifts from God and bless others with those gifts. Who is Jesus? Amen.