

**Proper 7, YrC (1)**

**20 Jun 10**

**Zech 12:8-10, 13:1; Ps 63:1-8; Gal 3:23-29; Luke 9:18-24**

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**Opening Question:**

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”

**Text:**

The Scripture text today from the Gospel of St. Luke is a story built around Jesus’ asking of his disciples what was undoubtedly the most profoundly incisive question ever posed, i.e., “*Who do you say that I am.*” This question is the epicenter not only of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but really is the most central and important question for every human being for all time, i.e., Who do you say that Jesus is? Who does your life say that Jesus is?

The vast volume of controversy and writing poured over the question of the identity of Jesus testifies to the infinite importance to untold millions of finding the Truth; or, as we Christians understand by Holy Spirit-empowered hindsight, the infinite importance of being found by the Truth. ☺ For in the end, the direction one’s life takes - eternally - begins with how one is able to answer this question.

Up until the moment in time when Jesus posed this question to his disciples, his public ministry had cultivated the soil of their hearts and minds through the wisdom of his teaching, through the power and nature of the miracles he performed, through the manner in which he interacted with the leaders of the Jewish community.

Now the time had come – and the time was just right - to bring what they were hearing and thinking out into the open... {paraphrasing} “Some say that you are John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the old prophets risen from the

dead.” But Peter, speaking on the disciples’ behalf exclaimed, **“You are the Christ of God!”** Yet, just as quickly as Peter had spoken this Truth – misperceived though Peter’s understanding was at the time – Jesus quickly commanded them to keep quiet about this revelation, i.e., about His identity.

And then He immediately began to press their understanding of the impact of this revelation for their lives to the next level, i.e., He began to teach them what would be required of the Christ; and what an ongoing relationship with him would require of them...

***“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”***

This is what would be required of the Christ... and the descent from the pinnacle of his public ministry to the passion and the lifting up of the Christ on the hard wood of the cross would now begin.

And what would be required of them if they were to continue to be his disciples? ***“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.”***

Jesus pressed his point regarding the saving of one’s life, i.e., ***“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself in the process?”*** The answer? From an eternal perspective, it doesn’t profit a man to gain the whole world. In fact, if a man is devoted to himself – to the fulfillment of his own pursuits and satisfaction of his own cravings – to acquiring the things of this world – fame, power, fortune – he will, in fact, in the final judgment, lose his life. As one commentator succinctly stated, “The self-seeking man who follows the principles of looking out for himself so successfully that he gains the whole world has made a bad bargain in the long

run. He may gain the world, that is, reach the absolute ultimate in materialistic success by possessing all wealth and power.

But he cannot finally save himself, for the final destiny of a human being is determined by God alone!”

**Illustration:**

I read a story once about a young woman who was a sophomore in college. She came to a university wanting to make friends, desiring to **fit in**, hoping to make a good impression & to do well. Yet she soon discovered that fitting in was going to cost her her soul. There were pressures put upon her by the in crowd - very subtle pressures, good-natured at first, all very friendly on the surface, nevertheless, pressures - telling her that "if you're going to have a part with the people who are really “with it,” you're going to have to “lighten up, loosen up, let go of all that pious stuff and get with the program." She quickly realized that "going with the flow," passively drifting along with everyone else, compromising her values and what she believed to be right & wrong, rather than being a righteous influence in her environment for Christ, actually made her feel terrible! But the social pressure to conform was really powerful.

This young woman realized that she was at crossroads in her life. She was faced with choosing to continue to walk down the narrow road – the way that Jesus described to His disciples and the road of light and true life –

or she knew she would inevitably be pulled down this other road, this road of the bondage of meeting other people’s expectations in order to fit, in order to be considered socially acceptable to the in-crowd, the road of self-indulgence and worldly acceptance, rather than immersed in the mind and life of Christ. ..enslaved to what Malcolm Muggeridge called, “the dark little dungeon of my own ego,” engrossed in selfish concerns and ambitions.

Which brings us back to the question posed by Jesus to his followers, “*Who do you say that I am?*”

The Apostle Paul wrote in his First Epistle to the Christians in Corinth (Chapter 15:3ff),

***“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (that is Peter), then to the twelve.”***

But there were some who were apparently questioning the fact of the resurrection – not unlike so many in our own day and age – to which Paul replied, ...

***“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.***

***We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.” ... “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” ...***

***“If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.” ... “If the dead are not raised, {let us give in to the pressures of the crowd} “Let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die.”***

***“But” Paul writes, “in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep!”***

Walking with integrity in our faith in the various places in this world the Lord has stationed us, i.e., that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ – is our Risen Savior – “the only Son of God, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God,” that he is indeed unique, ***“the way, the truth and the life,”*** and that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Walking in the integrity of our faith in This Jesus Christ means living our lives each day in ways that are faithful to our response to Jesus’ charge that whoever would come after him must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow him.

Through our baptismal vows, and on behalf of those whose baptisms we have sponsored, we have in fact publicly professed our answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" We have, with the help of God the Holy Spirit and through the hearing and receiving of the Gospel, confessed our faith in Jesus the Christ, initiating our life of response to his 3-fold challenge.

Recall the baptismal renunciations and affirmations:

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
- ... the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- ... all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?
- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

The indwelling Spirit of God, through our disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fasting, regular worship and sacrificial giving causes these renunciations of evil, self-indulgence and promises of faith to echo daily within our hearts, our minds, and our souls... reminding us to remain engaged in the holy obedience to which we have been called in this life. By these disciplines we are kept strong and fit to take up our cross and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ and to serve him here until that day.

Who does your life say that Jesus is?

The gift of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the beginning of true life, and responding by faith to his call to deny self, to take up our cross and to follow him is, in fact, true freedom.

The great Anglican preacher and theologian Father John R.W. Stott wrote in his book entitled, The Contemporary Christian, "True freedom is freedom to be my true self, as God made me and meant me to be. And

God made me for loving. But loving is giving, self-giving. Therefore, in order to be myself, I have to deny myself and give myself. In order to be free, I have to serve. In order to live, I have to die to my own self-centeredness. In order to find myself, I have to lose myself in loving. True freedom then is the exact opposite of what many people think. It is not freedom from all responsibility to God and others, in order to live for myself. That is bondage to my own self-centeredness. Instead, true freedom is freedom from my silly little self, in order to live responsibly in love for God and others.” (pg 54-55)

To know Jesus, “the Christ of God” is eternal life, and to serve him is perfect freedom... Amen