



LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Do You Know Who I Am?

Matthew 16: 13-20

I promised myself that I was not going to talk about the World Cup again from up here, I was way too excited earlier this year. So, I won't, but.. I do want to talk about goal celebrations. When I was a kid, a player would score and celebrate with fellow players, hands in the air, maybe punch the air, and then jog back for the restart. Now we have all these crazy goal celebrations, the most common being the knee slide which makes me wince every time I see it. I just know they will regret that move when they get to their 50's. They do silly little dances, pretend to shoot an arrow, my team Celtic just signed a guy who does this peacock celebration, because no one else does it. But the one that makes me furrow my brow the most, are the players who score and then run to the camera, turn their back and point to their name. They really want us to know who they are. Do you know who I am, this is who I am, this is who just scored that goal. This guy (or girl).

Having people know who we are can be quite important to some of us. Maybe we want to be recognized for something we have done like soccer players who score the goals. I think there is something inside us that wants to be remembered. We don't want to be forgotten. Sometimes we even ask our friends or family what do you think of me, we hope we are liked. That's a question that sounds a lot like, "Who do you say that I am?" What a question. We are continuing in Matthew 16 this morning. I hope you remember that last week, we looked at the beginning of the chapter where Jesus interacts with the Pharisees and Sadducees, regarding Jesus giving them a sign and then he speaks with the disciples and warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. I mentioned that this chapter was a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is moving toward teaching his disciples about what is to come as opposed to teaching mass

crowds. This morning we find them in Caesarea Phillipi and Jesus has questions for them regarding who he is. If this chapter is a major turning point in the Matthews Gospel, this conversation is perhaps where we pinpoint that turning point.

Of course, Jesus is not asking these questions because he hopes he is liked, or anything like that, this is an important part of Jesus teaching his disciples about what is to come and leading them into that future.

So, he asks them first, who do the people say that the Son of Man is? Now the title Son of Man would have been understood from the book of Daniel as a messianic name, so Jesus is being quite unambiguous here, I am not sure this is a big reveal when Peter talks, as Jesus has already been called the Son of the Living God in Chapter 16, and the disciples make a similar confession in Chapter 14. But Peter's statement is a clear expression of what has been disclosed even if this is the first direct messianic claim, Matthew has pointed to this throughout the Gospel.

But I am getting ahead of myself, Jesus is aware of the fact that there is speculation over who he is. I mentioned last week that he has been healing and doing miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees are worried about him, so Jesus sets up the discussion with Peter with the question about who the people say he is.

Speculation over who Jesus is, still goes on today. I remember watching a talk show in the UK, where the guests were Billy Graham and Sting. When asked a question about Jesus, Sting, stated that he thought Jesus was a great teacher, a wise man, but was not the Son of God, he was just a good man. That is not an uncommon opinion about Jesus. Billy Graham just nodded, I guess he was being respectful or didn't want to start an argument on the BBC. I was shouting at Billy to challenge him a little. The problem with Stings point was that Jesus couldn't have been a great teacher and only a man, because Jesus taught that he was Divine and acted like he was divine, so if Jesus was only a man, he wasn't a very good teacher. He was either lying or crazy. Or the third choice, he was who he said he was.

So, I think we go into this conversation with a presumption of who Jesus is. The debates of the day had Jesus as John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets, which may have all been legitimate suggestions. Then Jesus gets to the question that I think is the central point of all of this. He asks all of them, "Who do You say that I am?"

Jesus is asking them personally, this is part of leading them into what is to come, it is part of his teaching, he is maybe checking how much they have been paying attention. It's an important question, perhaps the important question. They are doing more than reporting back on what they have heard, now it becomes, what do you think, who do you say that I am?

We know Peter to be the disciple most likely to step up with an answer and he does not disappoint. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." I wonder if he managed to jump in before the others or if they were all looking at their feet without an answer.

Messiah is the Christ. The story of the Bible up to that point is that long ago, we lost our way. We call it sin, but we've also called it bigotry, racism, greed, lust, murder, hate, corruption, impropriety,, and many other names. And over time, many great people have been born, kings, prophets, wise men and women. But no matter the length of their lives, humanity resorts back to rebelling against God.

The promise of the poets, prophets, in the scriptures scripture, is that one day, God will do an amazing thing and bring the promised one, the messiah, the Christ, who will show us God's good plan for the world, uniting all people regardless of bloodline, language, skin color, and more, and creating a new kingdom, a kingdom without borders, , because his teachings will form their sense of identity and purpose, changing them from the inside out.

All of that, compressed into one word: Messiah. The Son of the Living God. Peter has nailed it, he got the answer correct and Jesus responds by saying that he is blessed, as this answer came from God and not him. Jesus says he will build his church on this rock which is Peter. It is from this scripture that

the traditional catholic teaching that Peter's successors as the leader of the church in Rome, the pope, carry on that authority.

Reformers argued that it is Peter's faith, which is shared by all that is the rock. Most modern commentators understand Peter to be the rock, the foundation of Christ's church, but acting in an unrepeatable way. There is then an interesting verse about Peter being given the keys to heaven and whatever Peter binds or looses on earth will also happen in heaven. This image of Peter with the keys has led to the tradition of Peter being the doorkeeper at the pearly gates. This may have been a reference to Peter being the leader as they spread the word.

However, I think the image of Peter as the disciple who has preached the word to all being he one who welcomes in believers Jewish and Gentile believers is a beautiful one. There is some debate over the terms binding and loosing on earth and heaven. Anna Case-Winters argues for a rabbinical understanding of binding and loosing teaching and living with clarity about good doctrine. We do not know for sure what Jesus means with this term, but it is very possible doctrinally sound teaching is a strong part of what is going on.

And then Jesus asks the disciples to keep this knowledge of him as messiah to themselves. A time will come when they go out and share this news, but that time is not yet.

We will see next week as we read through the end of the chapter that Peter the Rock on whom Jesus will build the church is not perfect. Jesus' words to him are harsh, yet he remains the one who Jesus will use.

So, we read this wonderful interaction and realize that this question has lived on through the ages. It has been the most important question for every generation.

And it is asked of us too.

Every person eventually must wrestle with the question Jesus asked His disciples:

“Who do you say that I am?”

The world has many answers. But Jesus invites us to give our own. Peter answered:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

That confession is at the center of our faith. And today Jesus is asking that same question of us.

Some interpret this a personal question just for you individually, but Jesus asks the disciples as a group. I think it is ok for us to address this individually, but also appropriate to address this as a group, as a church.

“Who do you say that I am?” And our answer is more than words. Our answer is found in how we live. When we forgive, we answer the question. When we serve, we answer the question. When we love someone who is difficult to love, we answer the question.

When we trust God in the middle of uncertainty, we answer the question. When we worship Jesus, we answer the question. When we give our lives to Him, we answer the question. So today, may we stop for a moment to ask ourselves this question. May we not simply know about Jesus. May we know Him.

May we trust Him. May we follow Him. And may how we live our lives continually proclaim our answer.

“Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”