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Sunday, August 30th
Something for Every Body
Matthew 16:13–20 and Romans 12:9–21.

Matthew is a Gospel that provides us with insight as to how to engage and interpret the world. In our reading today, Jesus brings the disciples to Caesarea Philippi. This is basically a boarder city in so much that it is a place filled with competing and conflicting claims about power, identity, authority, culture, worship and lordship. This is a city filled with shrines to many gods, multiple monuments, and the name of Caesar everywhere.

And in the Midst of this “imperial charged atmosphere,” the challenge comes from Jesus asking, “Who do people say that I am?” And then... without even giving much time asks an even harder follow up question follows: “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Does anyone else find it way easier to speak to what others might believe than plainly and succinctly articulate your own thoughts and convictions...? Just me? Okay cool!

This question “Who do you say that I am?” isn’t just for Peter to answer but a question every generation has to answer. Who is Jesus?

We are... and are not like Peter. We are in a very different space and time than the other disciples were when asked to respond to this question. First of all Peter encounters Jesus face to face, and at this point in his lifetime, Jesus hasn’t done anything that seems particularly “Messiah-esk.”

In this city of rulers and multiple idols. He doesn't yet understand what kind of Messiah Jesus will be. He is expressing hope and trust that God is revealing something new through Jesus. *It's the age old... Faith is not equal to certitude.*

Peter knows enough to confess Jesus as the Christ, Son of the living God.” despite having so much more to see and learn from this particular moment.

We now have the luxury of Matthew’s further writings, along with the stories and teachings of Jesus, to help us answer the question of who Jesus is. We have narratives of Jesus in action and multiple perspectives on the way he lives and leads. We have the witness of generations of Christians who have wrestled with that same question. And we have our own personal experiences of God showing up in our lives and in our world.

But in another important way, we are very much like Peter.

We too live in an empire-charged time, in which there are stark contrasts in beliefs, values, and opinions. There is discord over what and whom to believe. There are endless stories at our

disposal about both Jesus and the world around us. Stories competing for our attention, our trust, and ultimately our allegiance. We have no shortage of voices telling us who Jesus is, what he stands for, and what it means to follow him.

Peter had all of this swirling around him, too. He had heard the crowds. He knew the competing expectations of a Messiah. He had experienced Jesus firsthand, seen his power, heard his teaching, and yet he still had to make a choice about who he believed Jesus to be.

And perhaps that is where we are most like Peter. The question is not simply whether we have enough information. It is whether, amid all the voices and competing narratives, we are willing to recognize Jesus for who he is and allow that recognition to reshape what we believe, how we live, and whom we follow.

Peter could name Jesus as the Messiah, but he was still learning what that actually meant. His answer was right, but his understanding was incomplete. He could see something true about Jesus and still resist the path Jesus was revealing. The irony is that Peter's declaration comes before Jesus begins explaining what being Messiah actually means

Jesus will not be Caesar.

He will not establish God's kingdom through domination, violence, or military power. The disciples will have to learn that the Messiah's power looks like:

- service,
- sacrifice,
- compassion,
- healing,
- welcome,
- and ultimately the cross.

Jesus says “ I will build my church: not somewhere that is perfect, not somewhere that isn’t broken... I will not build my church in a place of solidarity or conformity, but I will build my church right here.

Here among the monuments and shrines and competing powers and ideologies. Here with you all.

Jesus isn’t building yet another monument he is building a people, a community, a body.

This is where Matthew connects beautifully with the words of Romans 12.

Jesus is said to give Peter special spiritual authority, leadership, and the unique responsibility of opening the door of the church to believers. And later, this responsibility is given to the whole community.

You see, the church isn't one person doing everything.
The church is a Body.

Had we read the beginning of Romans chapter twelve we would have heard that “*many members make up the body, but all the members do not have the same function.*”

The portion we read is Paul showing us what it looks like to live into this identity:

Love genuinely.
Honor one another.
Serve enthusiastically.
Pray.
Share with those in need.
Welcome strangers.
Weep with those who weep.
Rejoice with those who rejoice.
Live humbly.
Seek peace.
Feed your enemy.
Overcome evil with good.

Something for every body.

Not everybody has the same gift.
Not everybody has the same story.
Not everybody has the same role.
But **every body matters.**

The question isn't, “**Can I do what someone else does?**”

The question is: “***What has God given to me to contribute to the Body?***”

So here is a quote for you...

“***Find out who you are. And do it on purpose.***” any guesses as to who from..? How about...

“***It's hard to be a diamond in a rhinestone world.***”

Dolly Parton...

Have any of you taken a trip down the rabbit hole that is quotes and footage from Dolly's life, career and legacy these past few days. I am hesitant to confess the amount of video clips I have consumed since being notified of her death. What a woman!

And in this particular case, and in any situation, when we grieve or someone's life coming to a close we are gifted the opportunity to ponder: “**What does a life well lived look like?**”

Dolly's story begins in poverty and becomes a story of extraordinary success. But much of her legacy has been about what she has done with what she has been given and cultivated over the years like;

Her music.

Her creativity.

Her storytelling.

Her philanthropy.

Her investment in children and literacy.

She has continually turned what she has received outward toward others.

And that sounds a lot like Romans 12 to me.

Paul isn't offering us abstract ethics or rules for living. He is describing what happens when the gospel gets into our **bodies and into our relationships**. This concept that **“grace isn't something we simply possess, but something we pass on.”**

Dolly doesn't have to be perfect to help us see the principle. She was a woman of faith and a woman of the world. She is known for standing in solidarity with others and challenging the status quo. She readily spoke of Jesus, how she understood him and what he stood for.

We are not living in the shadow of Philippi, but our communities are not without idols, discord, and violence. Our communities are not void of insecurity and inequity.

We see people respond to insult with insult.

Hatred with hatred.

Paul says:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.”

Even the enemy is still a body.

Still a person.

Still someone whose life matters to God.

God's answer to evil isn't that we become better at evil. God's answer is that we become a people who interrupt the cycle of evil.

The Body exists so that we can hold each other up, see one another not as God but as of God. Sure it is easy to put someone like Dolly on a pedestal (and dang, she would look fabulous on it!). But we are challenged to live and lead as Jesus did, with our hearts. Another amazing example of this is if you watch Late Night and saw Jelly Roll give his final monologue as guest host on Jimmy Kimmel Live. He is very open about his past criminal offenses and missteps but shared from the heart as to how “it is never too late to do the right thing.” In an emotional monologue he shares how he too navigates being a person of faith and a person living in this world.

Return to Caesarea Philippi.

Peter is surrounded by monuments declaring who has power...

Caesar says one thing.

The shrines say another.

The culture says something different...

And Jesus asks:

“Who do you say that I am?”

How Jesus shows up is in such contrast to what I imagine his followers hoped for. When there is violence in the world, Jesus doesn't arrive with military force but speaks of peace. When there are limited resources Jesus distributes them fairly as opposed to holding them over those less fortunate. But when Jesus shows up it is surprising and intentional and invitational. Without all the information Peter declares him “Son of the living God.”

Because Jesus is the Christ, **we are his Body.**

And if we are his Body, then there is something for every body.

Something for the person who can sing.

Something for the person who can organize.

Something for the person who can welcome.

Something for the person who can cook.

Something for the person who can listen.

Something for the person who can give.

Something for the person who can show up.

Something for the person who can forgive.

Something for the person who can love someone others don't know how to.

Something for every body.

We don't all have to be Peter.

We don't all have to be Dolly.

We might not be Jelly Roll

The gift is we don't all have to do the same thing.

But we do all have to answer the question:

“Who do you say that I am?”

And then we have to live our answer. Amen.