

Who do *you* say that I am?

- Mark 8:27-30
- A famous preacher was visiting a nursing home and was in the lobby, waiting for the nurse to bring out the lady he was visiting. He sat down next to another elderly lady who was sitting in her wheelchair, looking at the man with a curious look on her face. He figured she was trying to remember his name since he was a famous preacher. So, he smiled at her and said gently, "Do you know who I am?" She said, "No, but if you go over there to that lady at the desk, she can tell you who you are."
- Well, we need to know who we are, don't we? But even more importantly, we need to know who Jesus is. This passage today represents a turning point in Mark's gospel. His purpose in writing it was to tell his readers who Jesus is. He said so in the opening line: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) This is not a mystery where you don't find out who the main character *really* is until the end: the narrator of the gospel tells us right up front. Then God tells us who Jesus is just ten verses later, when he speaks from heaven and says, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Later in chapter one, a demon identifies Jesus correctly, saying, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" But until this passage in the gospel story, no human has declared Jesus' true identity. The narrator has, but he is not in the story. God has, and demons have, three times. But here, as they are "on the way" with Jesus, as Mark tells us, is a turning point for the disciples. This is the first touch, if you will, as they will have their eyes opened enough to see who Jesus is, even though they will still not understand it. They have asked the question before, remember? In a boat on a sea that was still after Jesus told it to be still, they asked, "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Well, now they are on dry land, on a journey of 25 miles to Caesarea Philippi when they first identify the exousia, the divine authority with which Jesus commanded seas and demons, with which he healed the blind and raised the dead, with which he taught about the kingdom of God. They are on the way with Jesus to Caesarea Philippi, which is where one of the three main tributaries of the Jordan River gushes forth out of a cave. The Jordan River is a source of life for the nation, and as they get near it, Jesus, the source of all things including eternal life, opens the eyes of his disciples.
- Mark will use this theme of the disciples being "on the way" with Jesus 9 times in chapters 8-12 as he opens their eyes to the way of the Lord. They will learn, as we are learning, that it is a road of suffering, humiliation, and death. It is a way that can only be navigated by faith and empowered moment by moment by God's grace, because nothing else can keep us on the way. On Christ the solid rock we stand, all other ground is sinking sand.
- Jesus will lead them to this solid rock in two stages, as he did with the blind man. He does this with two questions. Let's look at those.
- **Who do people say that I am? (verse 27)**
- There may be three things going on here with this question. First, you might say that Jesus eases them into their own confession by going for something easier first. Right? It is a whole lot easier to say what other people believe about something than what you

believe about it. But Jesus is not just making it easy for the disciples. Second, He is pointing them to the majority opinions in order for them to see the stark difference between those opinions and the truth. We do not need to study the world religions, but when we hear a core truth upon which one billion Muslims stand, that Jesus was merely a prophet, that he was not the Son of God and he did not die on a cross, and he was certainly not the Messiah, that brings the truth of the gospel much more clearly into focus. The people of the day were saying he was John the Baptist come back to life, or he was Elijah or one of the prophets. In either case, what they were saying was that Jesus was simply a re-emergence of a forerunner. Someone who points to the One who is to come. A great teacher, sure, a miracle worker, sure, but **the** Messiah? No. People do the same today. Saying something like, "Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived and an example to all of us how we should live our lives," while not believing in him as Savior and Lord is nothing more than an insult. The third thing, and the most important thing Jesus may be doing with this question, is pointing his disciples to the difference between judgment and confession. "Here I stand, I can do no other." (Martin Luther) It is one thing to go through life believing the judgments of others about Christ and being impressed by them. It is a completely different thing to come to a place of confession for yourself. That leads Jesus to the second question.

- **But who do you say that I am? (verse 29)**
- Jesus turns the question now on them. He knows the Father is going to reveal the truth to them, which is why he says, "But who do you say that I am?" He had said to them in Mark 4:11, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God," and he knows that if the disciples are going to have a hope of understanding the secret, they can only do so by believing, by putting their complete trust, in Jesus.
- Vance Havner wrote, "I came to Christ as a country boy. I did not understand all about the plan of salvation. One does not have to understand it, he has only to stand on it. I do not understand all about electricity, but I will not sit around in the dark until I do! But one thing I did understand even as a lad: I understood that I was under new management. I belonged to Christ and He was Lord."
- That is what is happening in this passage with the disciples. They cannot remain spectators to continue "on the way" with Jesus. They must become true followers, participants in the way of suffering. If you believe that Jesus is a good man, in fact he is the best of all men and what a great example he is, blah, blah, blah...you will not be willing to die for that belief. If you say he is a kind man and a great healer and so wonderful to hear the stories about him...you will not be willing to die for that belief. But if you say, as Peter said, "You are the Christ," then you can be assured that, as Jesus said to Peter in Matthew's account, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven." Listen, saints, flesh and blood are in the majority with the Pharisees, and with Herod, and with the crowds. Then and now. Flesh and blood pass judgments on the "historical Jesus" and make documentaries about him without a shred of biblical truth. But we do not believe because of what flesh and blood reveals to us. We believe because the Spirit has opened our eyes to see him and to know the cost that comes with following him, no matter what flesh and blood all around us are doing.

- William Hendricksen wrote, “The kingdom is for vigorous people; for strong and sturdy men like Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Caleb. For such valiant women as Ruth, Abigail, Esther and Lydia.” I would add, and the servant girl who was kidnapped by the Syrian army and taken away from her homeland. Cindy and I were talking about that after last Sunday’s service and she said it is common for us to skip right past her and think, ‘oh, that’s nice what she did, to tell Naaman that there was a God in Israel who can heal.’ But this servant girl, a young girl!, had the courage to tell Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, where he could find help for his leprosy. She did not have to do that, and most would not do anything to help their captors, but she understood better than anyone in Syria that she was still in the hands of almighty God. She understood like Esther did that God had put her there “for such a time as this.”
- Who do you say that I am? Peter answers, “You are the Christ.” In those four words are packed truths like these: You are the Messiah. The Savior. Our only hope. You are the One sent to seek and to save the lost. You are the image of the invisible God. You are God in the flesh. You are holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty. You are my King.
- Years ago, the Archbishop of Canterbury was talking to Jane Fonda, the famous actress. And the Archbishop said to her, “Jesus is the Son of God, you know.” And Jane Fonda said, “Well, he may be for you, but he’s not for me.” And the Archbishop replied, “Either he is, or he isn’t.” Amen!
- Prayer
- Communion