

Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

Mark 8:27-36

By the time this story happens in Mark, Jesus has made quite a name for himself. He's been barnstorming the countryside on a streak of healings and teachings and other signs and wonders. The crowds follow everything he says and does. And, of course, he's got a closer group of followers, the disciples.

Now the word "disciples" simply means "students." But Jesus' students are not doing too well in class. They've been following him all over; they've seen everything he's done and heard everything he's said, but they can't seem to master the course material. This scene is about halfway through the Gospel of Mark, so I guess you could say this is the midterm exam. Jesus wants to know how much they've understood.

So Jesus asks fundamental questions of faith: "who do people say I am, and who do you say I am?" Jesus wants to know both what the word on the street is and what their personal opinion is. It is like the professor in class asking on an essay question what do the scholars say and what is your personal opinion.

These are important questions of faith because who we say Jesus is says something about how we live our faith. We listen to Peter who says Jesus is the Messiah or Anointed one or the Christ and say, yes, that is right. But our answer is deeper than that. How many names can you think of for Jesus? The Good Shepherd, Lord, Rabbi, Alpha and Omega, Bread of life, Holy Servant, Immanuel, King of Kings, Lamb of God, Redeemer, Savior, True vine, Son of God, and the list goes on and on.

The New Testament gives many images of Jesus. Each Gospel paints a unique picture in their individual understandings of the meaning of Jesus' ministry. Matthew says Jesus came to make disciples. Mark says Jesus came to tell the good news of healing, loving, and redeeming creation. Luke says Jesus came to bring release to the captives, sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free. John says Jesus came because God so loved the world God did not want to condemn the world, but wanted the world to be redeemed.

It is good to spend some time thinking about how we would respond to Jesus' inquiry. But, there's even more that Jesus is asking in this seemingly straightforward question, and perhaps it's this "more" that is the most challenging, the most demanding, the "more" we wish we could avoid.

Because "Who do you say that I am?" is at the same time, "who will you say that you are?" That's the rub of this question, the heart of its difficulty. If it we only had to provide an answer to Jesus' question of *his* identity, that would be one thing. However, answering the question of Jesus' identity also requires us to name our own identity as disciples of Christ.

Who you say Jesus is, is who you have decided to be. You can't answer Jesus' inquiry without revealing who you are. Or, we could switch it around. Who you are reveals who you have decided Jesus to be. Jesus' question is not a test. It's not about getting the answer right. It's the moment when you come face to face with your own commitment, your own discipleship, and your own identity. It's the moment when you have to recognize how you follow Jesus actually connects with some sort of confession of who you believe Jesus to be.

A few verses later Peter is saying to Jesus you do not know what it means to be a Messiah. But Peter's image of the Messiah tells us more about Peter than it does about who Jesus is. In verses 34-35, Jesus goes on to say "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it."

What does it mean when we say Jesus is "the Messiah" or Lord of our lives? What does it mean to follow Jesus? *Want to save your life - Lose it!*

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob