

08/23/2020: TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

MT 16: 13-20 - 2020

Our days are filled with questions. Even during these very trying times most are part of our daily routine. "What's for supper?" "Have you called your mother?" These times require we ask a new category of questions. "Did the kids attend their Zoom class today?" "Did you wear your mask when you went to the grocers?" They are not the questions we would have asked at a previous time, but now they seem to have become part of our routine as well.

Then there are even bigger questions that carry the extra weight of the times that we are now living in: "When will we finally get a vaccine?" "Do you think Frank will ever get off the ventilator?" These questions, which have been with us for some years, are now being asked with extra urgency. They reflect our social inequalities and tensions. "If not now... When?" "If not here... Where?" "How long must we wait?"

Some questions carry little weight or consequence. "Do you want sugar in your coffee?" Others require a lasting commitment: "Will you marry me?" Some challenge us to make a decision.

We are in chapter 16 of Matthew's Gospel today and Jesus decides it is the time to ask an important question. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The disciples give him answers that reflect how important people thought he was. "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." Then he asks a more pointed question, "But who do you say that I?" It is not what other people say about Jesus, it is what we say. Peter is the one who replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Place is important in gospel stories. Jesus had taken his disciples 25 miles out of their way, all on foot to Caesarea Philippi. That is where he asks his question. It was a city on a massive wall of rock, 100 feet high and 500 feet wide. On top of the rock was a marble temple erected to honor Caesar, who considered himself a god. Over the years hundreds of people carved out niches into the stone wall and placed statues of their gods in them and worshiped them. Before the massive rock that exhibited the power of the Empire and beliefs and forms of worship of so many people, Jesus names another rock.

Jesus is not merely the founder of a new religion, or a revolutionary Jewish reformer, or one of the great teachers. For Christians, he is the Son of God and our personal Savior. This means that we have to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the Savior, and the Redeemer. He is our beloved friend, closer to us than our dear ones and a living experience, who walks with us, loves us, forgives us, helps us and transforms our lives and outlook. We have to give all areas of our lives to him. He must have a say in our daily lives and we must radiate all around us his sacrificial love, unconditional forgiveness, overflowing mercy and committed service. The joy, the love, the peace that we find in Jesus should be reflected in the way we live our lives.

If I ask you to answer that question today, most probably, most of you would say that ‘Jesus is Lord, Son of God, Redeemer, Second person of the Trinity, messiah, Good shepherd and the list can go on and on.

My answer would probably be the same, but I would add one more thing. Jesus is also my best friend, a friend who cares about me and loves me even when I am not that lovable. Jesus is my best friend who knows everything about me, my inside out, and still loves me. A best friend is someone who knows you inside out and still likes you. Jesus is my best friend in whom I can confidently confide all my inner secrets, someone who walks with me, laughs with me even when my joke is terrible or not that laughable. Jesus is my best friend who knows everything about me, inside out, but still likes me. He is someone I can trust all the time without any hesitation. He is someone I enjoy spending my time with.

Jesus is asking each of us, today, “Who Do YOU say that I am?” It is the central question that Christianity asks its followers, because it contains the reasons for our faith and the foundation of our life as Christians. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, may we stand firm, confess Him and share Christ... boldly, clearly, confidently and correctly responding to His question by saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, my Savior and Lord!” And this is the good news of today.

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