

Who Are You Jesus?

St. Mark 8: 27-38

I really appreciate the apostle Peter. In so many ways, he is the prototypical person of faith. One minute he appears to grasp completely what is the nature of our relationship with God, through Christ. We hear him boldly proclaim, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God;" in much the same way we proclaim, "I believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." And then, in the next moment, it becomes clear Peter doesn't really understand what he has just said. As he then starts to rebuke Jesus by saying, "Don't talk like that Jesus, such horrible things cannot happen to you, to us." We too, have a variety of ways in which we contradict what it is we say we believe.

But, still Peter hangs in there. He struggles with what he is experiencing in Jesus and what his culture had always taught him to regard as the truth about who and what the Messiah would be. He continues to follow and struggle, but ultimately overcomes his many failings. In the same manner, we struggle to reconcile our beliefs and the ways in which we undermine our practices by our tendency to define our beliefs in accordance with our personal opinions and bias. We, like Peter, often ask, "Who are you Jesus?"

When the emptiness we feel in moments of despair and spiritual loneliness underscores a personal awareness of separation from God and neighbor, we understand just how Peter felt as Jesus said, "Get thee behind me Satan." We, as Peter boldly jumped in and then tripped over his feet of clay, so many times begin the walk of discipleship only to find ourselves diverting our attention away from the Lord and onto the ways of the world.

Oh, like Peter, we initially protest that we are indeed doing the will of the Lord. But, so many times, that will is of our own defining. Rather than listening carefully to the Lord's complete message of what is true discipleship, we like Peter, jump to conclusions and then find ourselves asking once more, "Who are you Jesus?"

The Jesus we thought we knew continually challenges our every assumption. Peter presumed he knew who and what 'Messiah' was to be. 'Messiah' was to be a leader who would restore the Davidic throne, the kingdom of God would become a dynasty on earth and all other empires would bow down. Messiah would live forever and ever and all power would be his and that of his chosen people. Peter was slowly beginning to come to grips with the reality that what he thought of as truth, was incomplete knowledge. The true kingdom of God is Spiritual in nature, God's will is for us to learn to grow in knowledge of truth and never assume that we have command of or all wisdom in our grasp.

For us, the question, of 'Who is Jesus', confronts us each and every day. And, the answer to that question begins to emerge in our soul as we listen, truly listen for God's still small voice speaking. Listening, not merely waiting patiently or impatiently to speak in response; but true soul listening wherein we still our restless spirit and allow God's Spirit to touch our own. "Quietly now I wait for thee, ready my God thy will to see, open my ears, my eyes my heart, illumine me, spirit divine."

Oh, how those words linger in the background as we busy ourselves with the many tasks before us. Are we willing to let go the assumptions that we are or must be in control and permit our creator to lead?

Can we jettison the many conflicting thoughts and emotions preventing us from truly learning to share, collaborate and seek consensus, instead of striving or insisting that matters be resolved only as we see

fit?

And following listening, is learning to speak as the writer of James counsels in today's epistle text. Slowly, thoughtfully and with great care are we to speak to God and to one another. How many times, in our prayers and in our conversations, do we conclude after speaking that what we said seemed like a good idea at the time? How many tragic or regretted events begin with speaking before truly seeking the guidance of God or a trusted confidant? Many like to boast of being a straight shooter or telling it like it is, when in reality they fail to check to see what is behind the bushes before pulling the trigger or in fact are only saying it as they see it or think it should be.

Read the James text again (3: 1-2)

As the writer instructs, it is not sufficient to praise God in worship, but then curse our neighbor. Do we not undermine our professed beliefs whenever we do so? Again, we need think only of the many times St. Peter spoke boldly, only to stumble in the next few moments. Only following Jesus asking him three times, following the resurrection, "Peter, do you love me more than these?," did he begin to grow in understanding and awareness of patiently allowing the Spirit to lead and guide his impetuous spirit.

Each of us, in our confessions, can begin or continue to learn to grow or mature in faith, as St. Paul would later teach. We too can begin to learn and accept that before striving to change the world, or at least our little corner of it, we first must choose to allow our spirit to be changed. Changed from attending to our own desires and toward a deeper commitment to discipleship.

Yes, the pathway of Jesus is fraught with potential peril. But, it also promises a deep comfort and rest for our heavy burdened selves. It may seem as a journey to great or difficult, but that is only as we choose to look at the whole picture and not the first step in front of us. Jesus promises to walk with us, on step at a time. Our choice is to be patient in the process.

Who Are You Jesus? I believe Jesus is hope in the face of what we see all around us. Jesus is the call, the encouragement to not give in to the temptation to live out of fear, but instead strive to give our very best to everything we do and to everyone we meet, whether we like them or not.