



Pastor Gwen's Message  
 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
 "Three Questions"  
 Sunday, August 27, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus asks two very big questions. The second one is far more important than the first. Both questions imply a third question. So, this morning I would like to look at these questions and see what we can learn from them.

The first question that Jesus asks is directed at the disciples. He wants them to tell him "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" We should remember that "Son of Man" is the title that Jesus uses to identify himself. Looking back to the Old Testament book of Daniel, we hear that God will give the Son of Man, everlasting dominion over the kingdom, which will never be destroyed. This title does not contain any of the military overtones that the title Messiah is associated with.

And Jesus, the Son on Man, wants to know then, what people say of him, who people think he is. And the answers to that question are many. Three answers given by the disciples are John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets of their time. All important people in God's story for sure.

What do people say today about who Jesus is? Some might also say a great prophet. Other might say that he was a Jew that failed to lead the revolution against Rome. People might admit that Jesus was a gentle philosopher that taught compassion and nonviolence. Still others might answer the question that Jesus was a teacher of the law. On the street today we are likely to hear some of these responses or even ones that say that Jesus ranks right up there with Mohammed or Gandhi, or Buddha. Some might see him as a man of action, a mystic, a great moral leader.

Even our four Gospels do not agree on who Jesus was. Different names even appear, where Matthew calls him, the Son of David. Mark most often calls him Son of Man. Luke calls him Savior of the world and John presents him as the Word made flesh. Hugh. . . Yet, Scripture is the way we find out who Jesus really is. I think that we all can say that Jesus was quite unique.

And now on to our second question, posed by Jesus. "Who do you say that I am?" Known as the impulsive disciple, Peter is quick to say, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus does not deny the title, but he goes on to tell the disciples that Simon, who is now to be called

Peter is blessed. He is blessed not by his flesh and blood but by the Father in Heaven. It is only through God the Father's revelation that Peter is able to really understand who Jesus is. We need to be aware that faith is not of our own doing, but rather a gift from God. Faith is not something that we come to on our own, but rather is by the will of God. When Jesus ascends to heaven, He leaves an advocate for all his followers. It is then through the Holy Spirit that we will come to know who Jesus and His Father really are.

Jesus goes on further to tell Peter who now has the faith of the Father, that it will be that faith that Jesus will build his church on. Peter now has the authority to speak and act in Jesus' name to all who turn to him in faith. The church will be the priesthood of all believers under the sole authority of Jesus Christ.

So, who do you say Jesus is? That is the critical question here. Is Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of your life? This question is of utmost importance to our future and our life here on earth as well. Confessing, Jesus as your Lord and Savior is the only way to salvation, through the gracious gift of God.

In Romans 10 we hear Paul tell the Romans, "That if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But now to the unwritten question #3. For some it is easy to say that Jesus is Lord of our lives, but then how do others see that Gospel in us. So, the question becomes, "Who do others say that you are?"

Think with me for a minute about that question. We are in a court room and Perry Mason is the defense attorney, will he have enough ammunition to keep you out of prison. Will he be able to defend you for being on trial as a atheist? Is there enough information for him to use to prove that you are a Christian and because of that you think and act different from the world around you? Can your life's example convince the jury that you are not an atheist but rather a Christian? Will you spend eternity in a jail cell as a noted unbeliever or will your life show enough evidence that you are truly a follower of Jesus Christ and will be set free?

I think there is a distinction here between knowing who Jesus is, in your head and knowing him in your heart. Knowing him in your heart is to live in relationship with him, to follow his teachings and to feel his presence around you as you walk in his footsteps.

A while ago I was put in touch with a woman who was struggling with a health issue. I did not know here but a friend of mine asked me to call her and pray with her. Well, I did just that and I had a wonderful conversation with her. She was going through radiation and chemotherapy for a stage 4 cancer that has metastasized to other parts of her body. As I listened intently to her, her voice seemed to get stronger. I was honored when she shared with me some of her journey. She shared that as she was under a grid proton machine at Mayo, the techs asked if she wanted some music. She inquired if they had any Christian music and they said yes. Randomly, the first song that came on was one that was her mantra for beating this cancer. As tears rolled from her eyes, she just knew that God was right there with her. A few days before her husband went to a prayer rally, as she was too sick to go with him. It was near their home, and they had gone to this event once before. He came to find out that the person they were praying for was his wife. No idea who or how that prayer request got to that little town, but again she felt wrapped

in God's arms. I was quite taken back with her openness to share such personal stories with me, and I heard myself telling this woman who is struggling to beat her cancer, that she was surely a blessed woman. After the words came out of my mouth, I kind of held my breath and she responded that she knew Jesus was with her and what a blessing his presence was. Listening to her speak about her experiences there was no doubt that she was a true believer who has given her life to God.

Do any of you remember those bracelets that some of us used to wear that said WWJD (What would Jesus do)? I still have one on my desk at home. What a good reminder that we should always think before we act, remembering what Jesus would do in a certain situation. This simple trick will help us go beyond our own humanness and respond in a more Christian way. And doing this again and again will transform our lives. Following Jesus example of loving your neighbor will become second nature.

There is a story told by Dr. McLarty that goes like this: I have a friend who's principal of an elementary school in North Texas. One day there was a minor altercation on the playground; a second grader pushed one of his classmates off the slide and while she was not hurt, it could have been dangerous. The teacher sent for the principal.

The principal then talked with the children in the hallway outside their classroom. She got their story and then explained the seriousness of playground safety and how important it was to be nice to each other. When she finished, the little boy apologized, and that was that.

A couple of days later, she happened to see the little girl with her mother in the checkout line at the grocery store. The principal smiled and they waved discreetly at each other. She got into the adjacent checkout line but was in earshot of the little girl. She overheard the mother ask her daughter, "Who was that lady who just waved to you?" The little girl said, "She works at our school." "What does she do?" the mother asked. The little girl said, "She helps people apologize."

As many of you know, I have been called on to do several funerals in the past few weeks. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be just what the usual obituary says about me. Life is much more than who we are related too and what we did for a living. I don't know about you, but I want to be known for helping others in Jesus' name. I want to be known as a disciple for Christ, someone who lived a life in service to others just as Jesus did. I want to be acquitted of the crime of unbelief and rather live a life in harmony with God.

So, to recap:

Question one: Who do other say that the Son of Man is? You can flush out a variety of answers.

Question two: Who do you say that I am? This is the critical question that I hope we can all answer. Jesus is the Lord of our life.

Question three: Who do others say that you are? Let people see that you have Jesus in your heart and that he walks with you daily as you serve others to the glory of His Holy Name.

And now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **AMEN**