



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

Once upon a time, in each Christians life they will have to come to grips with the person of Jesus Christ and what their relationship is to Him. And today we have a wonderful story where we can insert ourselves into the text to do just that. And so, I invite you to stay with me for a few minutes as we try to decipher, each one of us, "Who is Jesus in my life?" "What is my relationship to Jesus Christ?"

Our Gospel reading in Mark this morning begins with Jesus asking his disciples on their way to Caesarea Philippi, "Who do people say that I am?" He wanted to hear from these men, his closest followers, how they see Him and how others see him as well. In some ways this is a very time eternal question. One we can relate too today. I bet there have been times in your life when you have wondered how people see you and who do they think you are. It comes to the heart of our quest for identity.

I remember the first time my mother told me the story of my name. I had always wondered where the name Gwen came from. There were no other Gwen's in the family. Well, mom told me that when I was born in the hospital in Niagara Falls, the nursery was full of other newborns. A nurse came to bring me to my mother and said to her, this is the most beautiful baby here. Please do not name her Kathy or Karen like every other baby is being named on our floor! And so, mom and dad went out on a limb. I left that hospital

Gwen Ellen Brown. Names are the most common way that we know each other. People need to know what to call you. Your name is more than a label, it reflects who you are, your identity. I wasn't Karen or Kathy, I was Gwen.

There are many songs that boast of women with names from Brandy, Mandy, Cecilia, Elanor Rigby or Lucy (guess I am dating myself remembering these). And then along came Johnny Cash with "A Boy named Sue". That name would surely shape any man's identity.

Names can shape us. A strong name can inspire respect. We sometimes go through life changing our name or at least dreaming about changing it. We called our son Frankie when he was young, but today at the ripe old age of 33, he is better known at work as just Frank. Billy is known as William and Jenny Lynn becomes Virginia in later years.

I remember pouring over baby name books when I was pregnant with our first child. There were meanings to all the names listed and I suppose a history of self-fulfilling prophecy that could shape a person. But my first born would be named after my favorite grandpa, Albert Lee and Rodney's dad, Henry. When she popped out a girl Lee Henry somehow did not seem quite right. We had to rethink that one. And so, we have Leigh Grace.

Well, in the story of Jesus birth, his name was not chosen by accident; not with the help of a nurse, or a baby book or a desire to continue a family name, but rather as Luke told us in Chapter 1, "And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." This directive was from God brought to Mary by the angle Gabriel.

From the moment of His birth in the stable in Bethlehem to His death on the cross to now, all people of faith revere the Holy name of Jesus. Paul writes in Philippians 2 one of my favorite passages. "So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father."

Yes, the most common way that we know who people are is by their names. Another way people know who we are is by our relationships. Poor Rodney has had many titles in our 39 years of marriage: Gwen's husband, Pastor's spouse, Mr. Gwen, Frank and Leigh's dad and grandpa to Emmett. The Gospel

of Luke, Chapter 4 tells us a bit of who Jesus was, “isn’t this Joseph’s son?” Jesus was the son of a carpenter in the tiny town of Nazareth.

It is also true that we are known by the company we keep. Heard the statement, “Birds of a feather flock together”? Well, this can be good or bad. I remember my mom telling me that I had to be careful who I hung around with, who I chose as friends. How many times did she say, if your friends jumped off a bridge would you do it too? Makes you think of what kinds of friends you were making and what choices you made with them. I was probably too young as a strong headed teen to really understand what importance our friends had on our image. I don’t think it is a bad practice to take inventory of the people you spend time with. Do they encourage you in your Christian walk? Do they hold the same beliefs and Christian values?

Well, this was one of the reasons that the religious leaders had such a hard time with Jesus. He continually associated with some “Wrong people”: Sinners, tax collectors, Gentiles, lepers, social outcasts. He broke from Jewish tradition with even who he spent time with, talked to, touched and healed. Jesus’s greatest association was with His Father in heaven. Question here, do you spend enough time with your Father in heaven and have a relationship with Him? Your relationship with Him will go a long way in defining who you are as well.

Another way we know who we are is by our vocation. I know that most of you here this morning are retired, but think back then to your work life days. One of the first questions when we meet someone is “What do you do for a living”? Or maybe “What did you do for a living?” Did you ever think that your answer will make a difference in how the person asking looks at you? If you say teacher or social worker you would get a better nod than if you said spy or hitman, right. People do know you for what type of work you do. And no matter what that work is, if it is an honest vocation and you do it to the glory of God that is a good thing.

Well, no one could quite put their finger on what Jesus was, what vocation he had. Yes, growing up we assume he was a good carpenter. We know he was a Jew and spoke to people as some sort of teacher. So did that make him a rabbi? We know now, he was the ultimate teacher. Earlier in the Gospel of

Mark it says in Chapter 1, "They were astonished at this teaching, for he taught them as having authority and not as the scribes."

Was Jesus also a prophet as well as a teacher? He seemed to talk about his own death, which obviously had not come just yet. But he liked people, he liked to socialize. Remember his first miracle at the wedding he was enjoying in Canaan. Confusing for sure. Jesus just did not fit the mold of any vocation, yet alone Savior. He did not meet the expectations of the religious leaders. Guess he just did not look and act that part.

When I don't wear my clerical collar, who would ever guess that I am a pastor? Without our driver's license or passport who would ever guess we are Americans? Without a Bible in our hands, love in our heart and a cross around our neck, who would ever guess we were Christians?

So how were people to know who Jesus was? Matter of fact, how do people today know who Jesus is? I think today there is still no clear consensus about who Jesus is. People are probably less sure then just after he rose from the dead. And we know how sad that fact is! We know that Jesus died on the cross to give us his grace-filled gifts of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. So, who do we say that Jesus is?

Last Wednesday confirmation started here at CTS. Harrison and Zoey began their journey of learning the basics of the Lutheran Christian faith. They will learn what it means to become part of God's family, the authority of God's word and how we live out the faith in worship, sacraments and real life. They will learn the 10 commandments, the Apostles Creed and the Lord's prayer along with their meanings. But more importantly, I pray that they will catch the faith from me and from Margaret as we cover lots of ground, trying to give them a solid foundation to build a life of faith. And so please hold these young people in your prayers that the Holy Spirit will be with them, and they come to know Jesus and begin a personal relationship with Him.

So, who do you say that Jesus is? Do you know him by name? Do you have a personal relationship with Him? Do you spend time with Him? Do you see what an important vocation Jesus had? Who, just who do you say that Jesus is? Well, I think personally, that Peter got it right. He said, verse 29, "You are the Messiah." May we all hold that confession in our hearts as a reflection of

our faith, so we too can have an abundant and eternal life with Him. Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. AMEN