As someone who has spent nearly forty-six years as an ordained minister, I might have taken part in forty-five or forty-six annual reviews but I have not. There were some years we were too busy with other things and they just didn’t happen. Not that annual reviews are not useful and helpful even if they can be a bit of a challenge for perfectionist.

As I reflected on today’s Gospel reding from Matthew, I found myself thinking about Annual Reviews. Jesus asks his disciples about who people think and say that he is. It may be that he is doing a bit of a reality check in relation to how people are experiencing his ministry – he is seeking some feedback. The disciples report that some say, “he is John the Baptist, others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Jesus narrows the field. “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter ventures a response and hits the mark. “Vou are the Messiah” Jesus affirms the correctness of his response and them in ways that might have puzzled both Simon Peter and the rest he sternly tells them not to tell anyone.

It is widely though that Jesus offered this stern warning because he knew his understanding of being the Messiah differed widely from the expectations of his fellow Jews and that he was not prepared to meet those expectations.

Time passed and an event, reported in all three synoptic gospels, occurred that caused at least some of the disciples to think about Jesus in a new and different way, if you will pardon an attempt at an awkward pun, in a new light. We speak of the event as “the transfiguration” and it is the focus of our worship this Sunday as the season of Epiphany ends and we prepare to start our Lenten journey. As the story is told, Jesus heads up to the top of a mountain to pray, taking Peter, James and John with him. After they have been praying for a while, Jesus’ appearance changes and his clothes become a dazzling white. Then two others join him, Moses and Elijah. The disciples are struck with awe and wonder. Peter, ever anxious to please, wonders if they should create three dwellings. While he was saying this a cloud overshadowed them and only Jesus remained.

About 10 years ago a woman named Phyllis Tickle wrote a book in which she observed that about every 500 years all of the world’s great religions undergo a major rethink, setting aside, leaving behind or adjusting some in not all of their foundational beliefs and understandings.

So, if Jeus were to ask us who do we say that he is would we respond with the traditional responses? The Messiah, the Saviour, the son of God or have we come to see Jesus in a different way, in a new light. What if I see Jesus as saviour, not as one who saves me, who saves us, from the consequences of my sin, our sin. But rather as one who delivers me, who delivers us, from our worst selves, who saves me, who delivers me, from greed, from indifference, from cowardice, from selfishness, from being one who causes suffering for others and keeps them from enjoying life full and abundant.

As I studied theology, I was invited by liberation theologians, mostly from the two thirds world, to see Jesus as liberator, as one with a preferential option for the poor. In the last couple of decades, I have been invited to see Jesus as one who resists Empire, empire being all that dehumanizes and exploits both fellow humans and the gift of Creation, the environment.

Does it matter who we say Jesus is? Does it matter who we see Jesus as?

Dare I say it makes all the difference in the world in terms of what we say and do, how we see our neighbours and how we see ourselves. Let me close with this story.

Once there was a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Some of the younger monks had left in dissatisfaction, and no new men were joining. There were but a handful of monks and their leader, the abbot, remaining. They began fighting among themselves, each blaming the hard times on the faults and failings of the other.

One day a travelling rabbi stopped at the monastery for a night’s rest. He ate, and prayed alongside the other monks. The next day, as the rabbi prepared to continue on his journey, the abbot drew him aside. He told him of the problems of the monastery and asked him for his observations and for some advice to share with the other monks.

Upon hearing the abbot’s woes, the rabbi was quiet for some time.

“Cannot you give me some advice to help my monastery to thrive again?” the abbot begged.

“Your monks will not listen to my advice,” the rabbi replied. “But perhaps they would benefit from an observation. The Messiah dwells among you here at the monastery.”

“One of us?” asked the abbot astonished. “Which one?”

“Oh, that I cannot say, ‘the rabbi answered, “and in time it shall be revealed to you.”

The abbot thanked him and sent him on his way. He then gathered the monks together, who listened in amazement to the news.

“One of us! But who?” each one asked out loud. Then to themselves they wondered, “It couldn’t be Brother Robert -or could it?”

“Surely not Brother Henry, but there are times when . . . “ “ “Not the youngest, well maybe . . .’” “The abbot himself?” “Could it be me?”

Soon things began to change at the monastery as each began to see the Messiah in the other and to hear the Messiah’s words in each word spoken.

Some people began to wander back to the monastery, and in time new men joined and the monastery thrived. **The Messiah Is Among Us –** Doorways To The Soul edited by Elisa Davy Pearman

What happens if we see the Messiah in those around us? What happens if we see the Messiah within us? Is Jesus transfigured? Are we transfigured?