

“Who Is Jesus?” - Matthew 16.13-20 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Who is Jesus? Let's start by asking, Who is Jesus for Others? Jesus asked this of the disciples in this story. So think about what you have heard out in the world and around the community today, just how is Jesus perceived? We can glean some information by public opinion polls or word on the street. The old adage from Broadway was, “How does it play in Peoria?” Theaters would try out productions in Peoria, IL before bringing them to NYC. If they did well there, then they would be a hit on Broadway. Another example might be watching how the presidential candidates do in the straw polls and caucuses in early states like Iowa. Which candidates are real contenders and which ones pack their bags and aspirations and go back home? So, we might ask, how does Jesus do in the communities where he preached and healed? I find it nowhere in scripture nor taught as a belief in Jewish faith or Christianity. But the responses the disciples told him indicate the people on the streets must have believed in some form of reincarnation! Some apparently thought he was John the Baptist, who had been beheaded, now back from the dead, or else one of the ancient prophets back for a second chance. Around the world today, Jesus is seen by Jews - a rabbi, Muslims - a prophet, Hindus - a holy man, Buddhists - enlightened. None of them would claim him to be God or the Son of God, like Peter did in this story. Be aware that as you talk with other people, some see Jesus very differently than you and me.

So let me ask, Who is Jesus for You? Think about it, if I asked you could you turn to your neighbor and give an answer this morning? What do you believe? What sets us apart from other religions is that, as Christians, we believe that Jesus is more than a good guy. Jesus is God. And Jesus is also human. This is a great mystery – so great that no human brain can get fully wrapped around it and completely understand it all. But that is not to say we give up, I believe we can handle it if we have a handle or two to hold on to. Let me offer that there are a couple perspectives and one might fit better for you. I can pick it up by the favorite hymns or songs of the faith that people relate to, or scriptures or stories that resonate for people. Classically these would be called either high or low Christology. That may be a new term, so let me explain. Theology is what you believe about God. Christology = what you believe about Christ. So, if the scripture images and songs you prefer tend to have crowns or thrones like a king. If Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, exalted, high and lifted up, then you have a high Christology. I find Peter here blurts out an affirmation that he has a high Christology that for him Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” On the other hand if you hold to scripture images or songs that reflect Jesus as a shepherd, suffering servant, a friend or brother, or if your Jesus is down to earth, hanging out with outcasts, eating with sinners then you would have a low Christology. Most of us have both but probably lean one way or the other. I tend to have a low Christology. And I believe Jesus himself had a low Christology himself as he tended to be more humble than high and mighty in my reading of the gospels.

What Do You Say? Depending on the inflection this might be a good question or a nagging prompt from a parent reminding us to say, “Thank you.” But in this story, it is what do you say about Jesus? Do you say anything at all? Who was the last non-church person you told about your relationship with Jesus? It appears that if some Christians follow at least one commandment of Jesus, they follow the one that Jesus gives the disciples here at the end of the

story: *Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.* (Matthew 16.20)
How many of you obeyed this commandment and didn't tell anybody about Jesus last week?

Some have called this the Messianic Secret – but I do not believe Jesus was keeping secrets, but rather a confidence to later be revealed, at the right time. Knowing that in the Gospels there are things known as the Great Commandment and the Great Commission we will be learning about in September. Let me tell you I added a similar nomenclature to this command the Great Confidentiality. The first disciples seemed to keep quiet until Pentecost nearly 2000 years ago when they began to speak out about Jesus. For us – if not already, today is the day! In the context of this story, Jesus was not ready for the world to know it just then. Today, we remember that at the end of the Gospels Jesus commissions and commands the disciples (and us) to go and tell. What are you waiting for?

Let me give you some help with a homework assignment! This week, help Jesus take another straw poll. Ask people who Jesus is for them. You can say your pastor made you ask them if it helps. But once they share what they believe, I want you to do like you did with your neighbor here and share what you believe. For those of you who want to ask me, Jesus is my mentor. Who is Jesus for you? Alleluia and Amen.

Who Is Jesus for You

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 8/15/23

Jesus asked what the people thought,
And what they thought they knew.
Stop and think about it a lot,
Who is Jesus for you?

Hymns and books are written about,
All that Jesus might be.
But ask yourself without a doubt,
Who is Jesus for me?

And once you know you're called to go.
You have a job to do.
Go and tell others what you know,
Who Jesus is for you.