

## Jesus Is the Answer

Matthew 16:13-20

I'd like to introduce you to a character named Jemmy. Jemmy had straight black hair that hung down to her waist. The soft bronze color of her skin seemed to be a reflection of her deep brown eyes. The intensity of her stare revealed the sorrow in her life. Jemmy's mother was Chippewa, and her father was white. Her family didn't live in town, but they didn't live on the reservation either. When Jemmy was of elementary age she went to school on the reservation, but after completing the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Jemmy was bused into town, where she went to high school.

Roxanne was the only other freshman student at Eagleton High who had Indian blood. Because her mother and father were both Chippewa and she lived on the reservation, Roxanne never fully accepted Jemmy. Jemmy wasn't white, but she wasn't Chippewa either. Still, Roxanne would use Jemmy's friendship to get a free cigarette, stick of gum, or to borrow Jemmy's brown suede purse with the leather fringe. One day after school, Roxanne and Jemmy were sitting in their usual place at the back of the bus. Roxanne was chattering as always about unimportant things. But Jemmy, absorbed in her own thoughts, was paying no attention.

Then, out of the blue, Jemmy interrupted Roxanne with a question, "What do people say about me? Who do they say that I am?" Roxanne was stunned for a moment. The glaze in her eyes indicated that she was searching.

She was contemplating the answer to Jemmy's question. But she didn't have to search long. "Well," Roxanne said, "you know what they say, you've heard the names. Some say half-breed. Others say you're an easy date. Others say you and your dad smoke together all night long."

Jemmy looked into Roxanne's eyes and said, "What do you say about me to others? Who do you say that I am?" Roxanne was silent for an unusually long time. Then Roxanne broke the stare and said, "Well, I just say that you're Jemmy." And she changed the subject.

Jesus asked his disciples, "What do people say about me, who do they say that I am?" Then the disciples conveyed to Jesus the gossip of the day, they were careful to avoid the cruel titles they had heard. They didn't mention blasphemer, glutton, or wine lover. They said, "Some say John the Baptist, but other's say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

But Jesus wanted to know more. Jesus asked his friends, "Who do you say that I am?" A deafening silence replaced the eager voices of the disciples. They were happy to report the titles they had heard from others, but they were unsure about their own understanding of who Jesus was, and they were reluctant to reveal their uncertainty.

Peter may have stretched his thoughts and feelings for what seemed an eternity before he broke the silence. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." I wonder if Peter knew what he was going to say before he said

it. Did Peter understand what he was saying? Did he know what he meant by that?

As I worked with this text, a strange thought entered my mind. I wondered what would happen if instead of giving a sermon, I gave a pop quiz. What if I had read the Gospel and then passed out to each of you a piece of paper with one question on it? The question would have been the same for all of us. “Who do you say Jesus is?” Could you have answered that question? In agreement with Peter, some of you might have thought to write down the same words used in our Gospel, “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Others might have said, “Jesus is my Lord and Savior.” And still others, “Jesus is my friend.” Who do you say Jesus is? Could you answer that right now?

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus is your Lord and Savior. But what do you mean by that? What do you mean by those titles? Our answers may be more complete if we simply list words that describe what we mean. Jesus is almighty, loving, gentle, compassionate, understanding, forgiving. Jesus is my helper, my guide, my God. Using the words of a popular Christian phrase, we might have said, “Jesus is the Answer!”

Children often ask wonderfully deep questions in simple language. Will my dog go to heaven? If Jesus is in heaven, how can he be here too? My grandpa never went to church with us before he died; is he in heaven now?

Did Noah really live to be over 600 years old? How would you answer these questions?

Adults also have questions of faith. Many of us talk about the list of questions we want to ask God when we get to heaven. If Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, then why is there so much pain in the world? Why is there suffering? Why is there hunger? Why do people fight with one another?

Becky's closest friend died last month. Her daughter came home drunk last week. When Becky came home from the hospital after having a lump removed from her breast, she noticed a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus is the answer," she thought to herself, "The answer to what? To my loneliness, my feelings of inadequacy as a mother, or to my fear of cancer? If Jesus is the answer, then why is all of this happening to me?"

Sometimes we are too quick with our answers. We don't want people to know that we just aren't sure what we mean when we say Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We don't want people to think we aren't strong in our faith. We don't want to seem illiterate when it comes to the Bible. As people of God, we feel that we need to know the answers to questions of faith.

We think we should be able to give Becky a Christian remedy for her suffering. We feel we should be able to answer all of our children's questions

about God. We think if we are good Christians, we should know exactly what we mean when we confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And so, when difficult questions of faith arise, we are tempted to say Jesus is the answer and then change the subject. If we say anymore, someone might realize we don't have all the answers.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Yes, Jesus is the answer. The gift of faith places that confession on our lips and engraves it in our hearts. But how is Jesus the answer? How is Jesus the answer for Jemmy, a girl shunned by others because of her race? How is Jesus the answer for Becky as she finds herself dealing with one tragedy after another? How is Jesus the answer for the little boy who is concerned about his grandfather who never went to church? When questions like these arise, God doesn't expect us to have all the answers. We can confess our faith. But it's also okay to say, "I don't know. I don't completely understand how God works. I'm searching too. Can we search together?"

One day it will all be clear to us. One day we will be able to fully explain what it means to say that Jesus is the messiah, the Son of the living God. But until then we must continue our search. We must not be afraid to ask questions and to admit to one another that we don't have all the answers. We must continue to search the Scriptures, watch for God's presence in our lives, and look for the answers together. When we feel comfortable again to meet with each other we may want to have additional studies during the week in the Book of Faith.

As we search and as we struggle with questions of faith, God will bless us with the faith to proclaim, “You are the Messiah,” even when you don’t completely understand what that means. God will bless you with a faith to search. God will bless you with the answers to your questions because Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God!