

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd  
Pentecost 17  
September 16, 2018

**What Jesus Didn't Ask**  
**Mark 8:27-38**

**Summary**

*When Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter gave the right answer, but in the wrong context. Peter, like many today, believed that Jesus was the Messiah but did not understand Jesus' messianic purpose.*

An exhausted young mother dragged herself to the telephone when it rang and listened with relief to the kindly voice on the other end. "How are you, Sweetheart? What kind of day are you having?"

"Oh, Mother," said the woman, "I'm having such a bad day. The baby won't eat, the washing machine broke down, the house is a mess, we're having two couples over for dinner tonight and I haven't had a chance to go shopping yet. And to top it off, I just sprained my ankle."

The mother was overwhelmed with sympathy. "Oh, Honey," she said, "sit down, relax and just close your eyes. I'll be over in half an hour. I'll do the shopping, clean the house and cook your dinner for you. I'll feed the baby, and I'll call a repairman to fix the washing machine. Now stop crying. I'll do everything. In fact, I'll even call Sean at the office and ask him to come home and help out."

“Sean?” said the housewife. “Who’s Sean?”

“Why, Sean, your husband, of course!”

“You mean Jim, don’t you? You’ll call Jim at the store.”

“Isn’t this Julie?”

“No, it’s Tiffany.”

“Oh,” said the kindly person, “I must have dialed the wrong number. I’m sorry.”

There was a long silence. Then the desperate young homemaker asked, “Does this mean you’re not coming over?” This young mother needed someone to save her from her situation and the caller was ready to come to her rescue. But one question had to be answered first: Who was on the other end of the conversation?

Have you ever had someone call you on the phone and start talking, and you have no idea who it is? Or maybe the person left a message for you to return the call, but you don’t know who it is you’re supposed to call. Luckily for many, caller I.D. has alleviated some of those problem calls. On the other hand, caller I.D. can’t help when people we don’t recognize walk up to us and begin to talk ... and we wonder if we are supposed to know them or not.

A level of recognition is important before we will risk making ourselves vulnerable to someone else. Most of us would not share our most intimate secrets with someone we know just on a “hello” basis, like the cashier at the pharmacy or the mail carrier. We would not think of sharing our medical history with the kid stocking the shelves at the grocery store or telling the pizza delivery guy how much money we earned this year. For one thing, on that last one, we don’t want to find out that the pizza delivery guy made more than us; and for another, we don’t want him to expect a big tip!

Jesus wondered how he was being recognized. What perception of him did people hold, both those who knew him well and those who just knew of him? So he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And like a group of students eager to impress the teacher with quick and knowledgeable answers, the disciples began to list the things they had heard people saying. They suggested that people thought he was John the Baptist or that he was Elijah or that he was one of the prophets. But these were simply descriptions of the observations that people had made. There was no real recognition because no real relationship existed between any of the observers and Jesus.

So Jesus turned to those with whom he had a relationship, those who knew him best, and he asked again, “But who do you say that I am?” And it is at this point that Peter gives the right answer, but in the wrong context.

When Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, it quickly becomes clear that there is confusion over, not the “who” of the Messiah, but the “what” of the Messiah. Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but he didn’t recognize the “what” of the Messiah’s purpose. Like everyone else, Peter had preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would accomplish for Israel. And the imminent future that Jesus was describing did fit with “who” the Messiah was supposed to be.

We still get confused about who we are talking to when we offer prayers to a “magic genie” in the sky who we hope will grant our wishes and fulfill our desires. God listens to the prayers of his people, but not always like the kindly mother on the other end of the telephone conversation who is ready to drop everything and run over to our house and make our dreams come true. If that were so, we would all be lottery winners and living in luxury. But then ... if that were so ... who would grow the food, and build the homes and make all the conveniences that would give us our luxury?

Jesus didn’t ask, “What would you like me to be?” He asked, “Who do you say that I am?” He is the Messiah who came to save us. He did not come so that our lives might be made easy. We still get confused about Jesus’ identity when we compete in sports or run for public office or wage a war and ask God to be on our side on the assumption that we are the “good guys.”

We are confused about Jesus' identity when we want him to be our *Superman*, who -- faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive -- comes to our rescue. We make Jesus into our own personal campaign manager and God into our indestructible entourage that surrounds and protects us at every corner of life.

Jesus didn't ask, "What do you want me to be?" He asked, "Who do you say that I am?" He is the Messiah who came to save us. He did not come so that all of our political, theological and personal views would become the way of the world.

We still get confused when someone we love dies and leaves this world, when someone we want to be with leaves us and goes to be with someone else, or when we ourselves are stricken with disease, with broken and painful bodies, with the inability to do the things we both need and want to do. We are confused when we make Jesus into our guardian angel and the preserver of life here on earth. That's what Peter and the disciples thought they needed from Jesus. In their minds, it was Jesus' job to make life for Israel and its people a thing of beauty and glory. Jesus was the King, the Master Warrior and Great Physician at the same time. Jesus would lead them down the road to world dominance and create a heaven on earth.

Jesus didn't ask, "What do you need me to be?" He asked, "Who do you say that I am?" He is the Messiah who came to save us. He did not come to elevate God's people above everyone else on earth with Jesus himself sitting on a golden throne.

According to one account, certainly apocryphal, as Billy Graham prepared to get into his limo one day, he said to the driver. "You know" he said, "I'm getting to be an old man and I have never driven a limousine. Would you mind if I drove it for a while?" The driver said, "No problem. Have at it."

So Billy got into the driver's seat and they headed off down the highway. A short distance away sat a rookie state trooper. The long black limo went by him doing 70 in a 55-mph zone. The trooper pulled out and easily caught the limo and got out of his patrol car to begin the usual procedure. The young trooper walked up to the driver's door and when the glass was rolled down he was surprised to see who was driving. He immediately excused himself and went back to his car and called his supervisor.

He told the supervisor, "I know we are supposed to enforce the law but I also know that important people are given certain courtesies. I need to know what I should do because I have stopped a very important person."

The supervisor asked, “Is it the governor?”

The young trooper said, “No, he’s more important than that.”

The supervisor said, “Oh, so it’s the president.”

The young trooper said, “No, he’s even more important than that.”

The supervisor finally asked, “Well then, who is it?”

The young trooper said, “Well ... I think it’s Jesus because he’s got Billy Graham for a chauffeur.” At least the trooper wasn’t confused about who Jesus is.

It simply comes down to this: Jesus came to earth to serve, not be served. His service ultimately cost him his life. And that was the price for our salvation.

“Who do you say that I am?” That’s the question Jesus asks each of us. He doesn’t want to know what we would like him to be, or want him to be ... or even need him to be. Jesus wants a relationship with us so that we can know “who” he is. We answer that question each day of our lives.