

Who are You?

Psalm 19
Mark 8:27-38

Sunday, September 12, 2021
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I would like to start this morning with a short story: A little boy who lived far out in the country in the late 1800s had reached the age of twelve and had never in all his life seen a circus. Imagine his excitement, when one day a poster went up at school announcing that on the next Saturday a traveling circus was coming to the nearby town.

He ran home with the glad news and the question, "Daddy, can I go?" Although the family was poor, the father sensed how important this was to his son. "If you do your Saturday chores ahead of time," he said, "I'll see to it that you have the money to go."

Come Saturday morning, the chores were done and the little boy stood by the breakfast table, dressed in his Sunday best. His father reached down into the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a dollar bill-- the most money the little boy had possessed at one time in all his life. The father cautioned him to be careful and then sent him on his way to town.

The boy was so excited, his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground all the way. As he neared the outskirts of the village, he noticed people lining the streets, and he

worked his way through the crowd until he could see what was happening. Lo and behold, it was the approaching spectacle of a circus parade! The parade was the grandest thing this lad had ever seen. Caged animals snarled as they passed, bands beat their rhythms and sounded shining horns, and acrobats performed stunts while flags and ribbons swirled overhead.

Finally, after everything had passed where he was standing, the traditional circus clown, with floppy shoes, baggy pants, and a brightly painted face, brought up the rear.

As the clown passed by, the little boy reached into his pocket and took out that precious dollar bill. Handing the money to the clown, the boy turned around and went home.

What had happened? The boy thought he had seen the circus when he had only seen the parade!

Just like the boy missed the circus because he didn't really know what a circus was, there are many people who miss the opportunity of salvation because they don't actually know who Jesus Christ is. There are people who even call themselves Christians who mistake knowledge for a relationship with Jesus. They get caught up in the parade, and never make it to the actual circus.

Well, those Christians are not alone. In today's Gospel message we find the twelve disciples sitting with Jesus, and he asks two poignant questions that cause the disciples to pause.

The first question is "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" Now, you can take this question in one of two ways. First, Jesus could be asking who the crowds are believing to be the Son of Man. If this is the direction your thinking went, then the answers make sense. The crowds believe the Son of Man is "John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." With this view of the question, the Son of Man could be a historic figure who has already passed and may have come back to life. You need to recognize that Jesus has not yet been introduced as the Son of Man at this point in His journey.

The second way to look at the question is to recognize that Jesus is talking about himself as the Son of Man. With this frame of reference, the disciples, Jesus' closest allies, are saying that people say he is a reincarnated being who did great things in the past.

With either view of the question, the disciples and the people of that time period did not understand who Jesus was, and they could not allow themselves to name Jesus as the Son of Man. Let me remind you that these followers have seen Jesus:

- Change water into wine, not just wine, but the finest of wines.
- Feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish, with twelve basketfuls left over.
- Walk on water during a storm and calm the storm by getting in the boat.
- Heal lepers, give sight to the blind, make cripples walk and make a woman's hemorrhaging stop.
- Demand that demons come out of people, even sending them into a herd of pigs.
- Watch Jesus come to the tomb of Lazarus, who had been dead for three days, and tell him to get up and come out. They saw Lazarus alive and breathing and coming out of the tomb.

The people saw the miracles, heard the authority that Jesus spoke with, and even traveled and lived with the touchable human Jesus. But, like the boy at the circus, they let the “clown” in the back of the parade have the credit and missed the relationship of knowing who the Savior really was.

Then Jesus changes the question to the disciples and asks, “Who do you say I am?” Can you feel the silence? Can you feel the disciples taking the big gulp of air as they drive their eyes to the ground and silently pray that Jesus doesn't point to them and say, “Answer me”? What if the disciple answers wrong, will Jesus

discipline him? What if they say something that could be considered a heretical statement and a pharisee found out? That could be punishable by stoning.

But then, one of the twelve speaks up and, wouldn't you know, it is Peter. The disciple who speaks when not spoken to. The disciple who tells Jesus that He is not allowed to say certain things. The disciple who is brazen with words and wears his feelings right out there on his shirt sleeve. Yes, it is Peter who, without fear, states, "YOU ARE THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD." And everyone, who did not have the ability or the guts to say this, had their jaws hit the ground. Can you see their eyes lift up to Jesus in anticipation of his response? Either Jesus is going to condemn Peter, or something glorious is going to happen.

Then Jesus looks at Peter, maybe with a tear in his eye, maybe with a wry smile, or maybe with a beam of joy as He says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and, on this rock, I will build my church." And all the disciples exhale and regret that they didn't speak up.

Here's something else that is interesting: As a seminary student, in my study of the ancient languages, I learned there is something that the English language has no

ability to do. You see, our language speaks specifically in either the past, present or future tense, but in Greek and Hebrew, there are other tenses. Sometimes the tenses allow for something that occurred in the past to also point to the present and the future. Today, we see this in Jesus' question to the disciples. For the question is not just for them, it is a question for everyone, including you and me this morning.

So, how do you answer the question that Jesus asks, "WHO AM I?"

I am worried about how some of you might answer because this world wants us to view Jesus as:

- just another religious figure
- a symbol of a set of rules
- maybe, like the disciples, Jesus is "just another prophet"

Or maybe, Jesus has been revealed to you and

- His teachings permeate your soul, and transform your life;
- His message of redemption is personal and you have begged forgiveness for your sins;
- His light has shown deep within your soul and you can now call Him brother;

- You recognize this man who was born of a virgin, walked this earth, died on a cross and is now **ALIVE AND BREATHING**, seated on the throne of God as part of the Trinity.
- You, like Peter can say, “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!”

When you are deciding how you would answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” consider what C.S. Lewis wrote: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-- on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg-- or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

You have a chance this day and every day to ask yourself the question, “Who is Jesus?” If your answer is the Son of God, who is **ALIVE AND BREATHING** because he rose from the dead following His crucifixion on the cross. Then you will be Alive and Breathing on the day of the resurrection. If you have not committed to Christ yet, please know that you can make that choice today.

We have been listening to the song “Alive and Breathing” by Matt Maher for the past month in anticipation of this Celebration Sunday. Within the lyrics, Maher speaks to people who are in different places in their relationship with Jesus Christ. He speaks to the person whose soul is stirring for the first time. He speaks to the person who is overwhelmed by the cares of this world. He speaks to the person who has been a Christian for a long time, but has forgotten the joy that Jesus brings. And the response that Maher gives is:

Joy still comes in the morning

Hope still walks with the hurting

If you're still alive and breathing

Praise the Lord

Don't stop dancing and dreaming

There's still Good News worth repeating

So lift your head and keep singing

Praise the Lord

Let everything praise the Lord

In the working, in the waiting

In the blessing, in the breaking

In the dying, the rising

Let it praise the Lord

Praise the Lord

And Blaine Christian Church is ALIVE AND BREATHING, and we need to spread the word to anyone and everyone who does not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Tell them that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. Please give them an invitation to join you in the family that is God's. Help them to become a brother or sister in Christ.

Let me ask you? When the parade comes by, are you the one standing and watching or do you climb the sycamore tree to get the bird's eye view of the Savior and when the Savior says come down, do you take Him into your home...that is your heart? Ladies and gentlemen, it is time that we hear some dry bones rattling in this church. Get impassioned about your Savior because He is impassioned about you!

I want everyone in this room to be ALIVE AND BREATHING on the day of the resurrection.

When you are asked "who Jesus is," have your answer ready.

And all God's people said, "Amen!"