

August 27, 2023

Matthew 16:13-20

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the [Child of Humanity] is?” <sup>14</sup>And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my [Parent] in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup>Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

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The powers-that-be were trying to figure out who Jesus is: John the Baptist, Elijah, who was due back, Jeremiah or some other prophet. Those were nice theological choices. Others were hoping he was going to be a military leader, kick the Roman occupation out, and re-establish Israel as a formidable kingdom. Still others would have said he was an anarchist, a traitor, or even the devil.

Jesus uses a contemporary theological idea, when asking his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” He refers to himself as the “Child of Humanity”. This phrase can be understood in two ways. The Child of Humanity is, literally, a human being (a male, of course). Or, from the Book of Daniel, the Child is a superior man, with God-like powers. It was an

important concept 2,000 years ago. Today, this seems to be “much ado about nothing”.

Nonetheless, Jesus is asking his disciples who they believe him to be. He was not asking for a theological definition of the Child of Humanity. He was asking who they thought he was. He wanted to know why they were following him around. Peter answers, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

It has been over 2,000 years since this story unfolded. I am pretty certain that Jesus’ radical allegiance to God would have turned me off. I often wonder what being the messiah meant to Jesus. There is a very good possibility that he thought the end of world was near. Perhaps he hoped he would be “saved”, taken off the cross and lifted up to a position of earthly power. There is no doubt that he believed God/God’s reign over the powers-that-be was near. I really don’t know what was in Jesus’ mind; nobody really knows. And, I don’t think it is important.

What has been understood and given to us over the centuries is important. After all, Jesus lives on as the Body of Christ. Still, we have to sift through the good and the bad of what has been delivered in order to determine what we believe or don’t believe about Jesus.

As you have heard me say, often, that I am convinced the doctrines of our faith are good teaching tools, but are limited and, ultimately, have to be discarded, if we are to grow into the relationship with God that Jesus was trying to establish for himself and others.

The most detrimental doctrine of our faith has to do with a preposition. Many Christians talk about having faith *in* Jesus. While this phrase is found in the Bible, I believe how

it is used is wrong. Jesus did not want us to have faith in him, rather to have the faith of Jesus in God.

Jesus' faith, his complete trust in God is what makes him worth emulating. It is what makes him the Messiah for me; the one to lead me into a life-giving relationship with the Holy One. Put another way, there is a doctrine, a teaching of the church that I do accept: Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. This doctrine is important to me, because it tells me Jesus knows the way to God, the way to the Holy One.

So, to contradict myself, I guess I do have a faith in Jesus. It is a faith that challenges me to have the faith of Jesus and follow him on the way he has taught and lived. Following Jesus on the Way is a way to healing and wholeness in the midst of my brokenness. It is a way to full life, even in the midst of troubles and pain and poor health.

I am working on my faith; working on having the faith of Jesus. I am doing this, because I truly believe it would make my life so much better. But such faith, such trust is not easy. Some days are better than others; some days I am more faith-filled than others. I stumble and fail, regularly. However, I do believe that no matter how faithful or faithless I am, God still loves and accepts me, as I am.

The answer to the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?", is not dependent on doctrine, rather it is dependent on faith, on trust in God. It is a question that is still very relevant for us today. Each one of us has to figure out who Jesus is for us.

So, who do you say Jesus is? Amen.