

Pentecost 12A / Proper 16

August 27, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Isaiah 51:1-6

God said, 'My salvation will be forever.'

Romans 12:1-8

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.

Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus said to them, "Who do you say that I am?"

Jesus defined himself by using many names; bread of life, light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the vine, the way, the truth and the life. In the eighth chapter of Matthew (8.20), Jesus took upon himself the name given before him to the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of Man". Jesus asked his disciples "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they answered; John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or maybe one of the prophets." So to this point they hadn't figured out who he was. Then Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" It is important to notice that Jesus did not tell his disciples who he was, but he asked them what they had figured out for themselves, based on what they had seen him do and heard him teach. Even of his first followers, just as it is true for you and me, Jesus requires that we freely, on our own, recognize who he is. So if there are times you are working out just who Jesus is in your life, you are in the same place his closest friends were.

Then Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" The form of the word "you" in the original Greek is an emphatic use. So this statement is saying, "Okay, that's what other people are saying, but who do you say that I am?" And Peter speaks for the group: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This was the first time that anyone had claimed Jesus to be the Messiah.

The Hebrew word Messiah has the same meaning as the Greek word Christos, where we get the name Christ (Jesus the Christ). Both words in English mean: anointed. Jesus is the one anointed by God for a special purpose. And the meaning from OT scripture was that one would come, anointed by God, to rescue Israel from oppression. Impulsive Peter was the only one to answer that Jesus was the one sent to deliver them from their oppression; and that Jesus was divine: the Son of God.

### **What is your answer to Jesus asking "who do you say I am?"**

When I was a boy, I got very unclear teaching of who Jesus was. I knew he was kind, and knew God, and did miraculous things, like walking on water. That was about it.

When I was in my twenties, I joined some men's bible studies, and moved a little past my childhood Christian education. I learned about Jesus being a person who could connect us more closely with God. I didn't really get how that was supposed to happen, but I knew that I did feel closer to God when I read bible stories about Jesus' life.

A little later in my life I went to a Baptist church for a few years, because there were rumors spreading around my home town that exciting things were being taught there, and

happening there. I learned that Jesus Christ was a human being, but like no other human being, because he also had all the power, and glory, and wisdom, and love of God living in him. He was God, who became man in human form, to teach us and model for us how He wants us to behave, and what kind of relationship He wants with every human being. We humans got it wrong, and He wants to fix what we got wrong. He is not a God of rules, He is a God of love – self-giving, agape love.

Later on, when I was back in the Episcopal Church, I was invited by my parish rector to attend a Cursillo weekend. That event taught me that Jesus wants to be, and can be, my best friend and my confidant and my spiritual partner in life, if I invite him to be. I now look to him to guide me through challenges, decisions, and celebrations in my life. There are times I jump in and take over, but I think I am getting better about seeing Jesus that way. Sunday school, Bible studies, a fundamentalist church, Cursillo, formed my image.

What events in your life have formed your understanding of who Jesus is? What role have you allowed Jesus to play in your life? What study have you done to learn more about who Jesus is? On this continuum from Jesus being a kind, holy man, to being the divine power you look to throughout your day, where is Jesus today? How is that understanding of Jesus different than it was when you were a child, or even ten years ago? How can we as this faith community keep growing in our understanding of who Jesus is?

Rev Ardyss has just completed a four week Summer Journey of reflection on ‘Traveling with Jesus’. For the first meeting, she asked us to bring our ‘favorite’ picture of Jesus, one that depicts who he is to us, and to explain why it is our favorite image of Jesus. My handout today (or the pictures on the monitor this morning) contain some of the pictures that were shared, and others that are very familiar to me. The last two are Ruth’s and my current ‘favorite’ pictures of Jesus. Mine was painted by Heinrich Hofmann – It presents Jesus as very approachable, solemn, and all-knowing. Ruth’s favorite picture shows how Jesus is with us today, right by our side, every minute. What is your favorite image of Jesus, and why?

When we get to heaven, God will ask us what we did in our lives about His son. Everything we read in Scripture tells us that what we do about His son shapes us. Paul says that these decisions about Jesus ‘transform’ us; they renew our minds / so that we are able to know God’s will. This is so important that it doesn’t only affect us in our next life in heaven, but it changes us in this life too.

What we do with Jesus Christ matters. What we decide to believe matters; and who or what we decide to follow and worship matters. This is a process of being open to God in mind AND heart. The decision we make about Jesus Christ shapes our being, and it shapes our eternity.

This week I ask that you explore Jesus’ question to you: “Who do you say I am?” Amen.