

August 23, 2020

Wow... a lot of material in our gospel lesson! This morning, let's do some reflecting with Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" That's a big question! And Peter nails it... Peter says the Messiah, and son of the living God.

Now, think about other titles we've come to describe Jesus, Emmanuel, Redeemer, Lord, Christ, the anointed one, Rabbi, Healer, Lamb of God, Savior, and of course many others. And it's quite natural that Jesus would have many titles; because we've experienced Jesus to be many things.

In early Christianity there was a big controversy over understanding who Jesus was... And the controversy generally centered around two fundamentally different ideas. Some people thought Jesus was primarily a human being, who became divine. This is called low-Christology. And the opposite view was that Jesus was primarily divine, and became human. This is called high-Christology.

Others thought that Jesus was not really human or really God, but something in the middle, kind of like a middleman, someone to mediate between humanity and Divinity.

In the early centuries of Christianity, these different views led to what is known as the Christological controversy. People were fighting over these different theological ideas, and the roman emperor Constantine was worried that the controversy was going to divide the empire, so he gathered all the leading theologians and ordered them to settle it.

This gathering became known as the council of Nicaea in the year 325. From that council we also got the Nicene Creed, which of course, seventeen hundred years later, is still in our hymnal. The council of Nicaea also set the formula for determining when Easter would be held each year. A couple of interesting facts...

But even the Council of Nicaea couldn't settle the issue. Theologians kept arguing about Jesus, and again it began to divide the Christian world. So, this time a Byzantine emperor Marcianus called for another council of the church to get things settled. This became known as the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The history of Chalcedon is rather appalling. Each of the groups represented were so entrenched in their own positions, essentially, they all ex-communicated each other. And finally, in the end, the groups that remained pretty much just "rubber stamped" the wishes of Pope Leo the Great.

The Council of Chalcedon said that to speak of Jesus properly, we must talk about Jesus in two equal and yet opposite ways. Jesus is fully human, and at the same time Jesus is also fully divine. Jesus is not one or the other, but both/and. This formula has essentially become the standard for what is referred to as classical Christianity. A standard we still adhere to even today.

At the heart of this formula, is essentially a paradox; two opposites that are both equally true. Jesus is the son of man and the son of God. And so fundamental to the question of who is Jesus, we are invited into a paradox, a mystery.

And I wonder if this mystery about Jesus is really the beauty and perhaps the wisdom of God. You see, generally speaking we like things black and white, we want things to make sense, we like things that are easy to explain.

But how we think about Jesus is not a simple matter... And it might be hard for us to understand and comprehend, but I think that's the beauty of Jesus. Jesus is fully human and fully divine, and at the same time.

And there is a power at work in paradox; it pulls us out of our simplistic thinking. And when we enter into that mystery, we enlarge our capacity to hold opposite truths together, without

needing to explain everything. You see, it's not so much a change in *what* we think, but rather *how* we think. It is a change from either / or thinking, to both / and thinking...

Quick story... When I was in Seminary, we were given the assignment to write a paper on this exact gospel lesson and answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" I wrote this big long paper covering the Christological controversy, I went on about Luther's understanding of Christology...

I had a lot of quotes and footnotes and a long bibliography. When I handed the paper in, I felt very proud of it. I thought, boy I'm smart. I was all puffed up and proud of what I knew...

When I received the paper back, the professor commented that I did a good job telling her what others thought about Jesus, but that I hadn't said anything about how I would answer Jesus' question, "But, who do *you* say that I am."

At first, I was defensive and thought she was just being picky... But the more I thought about it, the more I realized she was right.

Since then, my own journey into discovering Jesus has been less about my head and more about my heart. Again, not so much about *what* I know, but *how* I know...

If I was to write a new paper answering the Jesus question -- "who do you say that I am"-- I think I would just tell stories of every time I've experienced love, or every time I've been forgiven, or every time I've been healed...

In a very real way, as I think about our congregations, Jesus is so many of you, in all the ways we are loving, kind and gracious people.

This past week, I saw Jesus when I went out for a visit. We sat outside, shared stories, talked about our families. I heard about the love of a parent for a child. I heard about growing old, and doing it gracefully. And I felt cared for-- they wanted to know how I was doing... And when I left, I felt blessed. They were like Jesus to me...

The previous week, I saw Jesus at the council meetings. At both Cross of Christ and Cannon River... People came together to do the business of the church. People expressed ideas, everyone listened, decisions were made... Everyone was loving, kind and gracious...

Last Sunday, I saw Jesus in the sanctuary at Cross of Christ, people came in small groups to share communion. We gathered and said prayers, we shared in the body and blood of Jesus, again and again, I was reminded that all together, we are the body of Christ in this place and time. Each person who came was like Jesus to me...

And so, now I ask you, who do you say, Jesus is?

Amen...