

What Does My Life Proclaim? 2020
Psalm 102:1-4, 11-12, 25-28, 103:22 Matthew 16:13-20

Psalm 102:1-4, 11-12, 25-28, 103:22 (New Revised Standard Version)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations. Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Matthew 16:13-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "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 the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 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." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

I came across a couple of interesting articles last week.

The first was about how much more difficult it is
to get a read on people, especially emotional responses
with their face partially covered by a Covid-19 mask.

The other article was about how exhausting & frustrating it can be,
trying to form an accurate impression or a deeper connection
while using a video conferencing application such as Zoom.
Without in-person communication, nuance is often misunderstood
and getting to really know someone becomes more challenging.

That got me thinking about my understanding of Jesus Christ.

What would it have been like to see and hear Jesus in-person,
& what would be my impression, connection & response to him?

In the Matthew passage, Jesus had been out in public nearly 3 years.

During that part of his earthly ministry Jesus had been
preaching and teaching, eating with sinners and outcasts,
healing the sick, and doing many other amazing miracles.

That provided more time ample time and opportunity
for the crowds and for the disciples called to follow him

to gain a clear sense of who he was and his mission.

The Gospel of Matthew was written in a literary form
that intends to gradually reveal who Jesus Christ is.

And from Caesarea Philippi onward there is a shift in focus
toward **preparing the disciples** for the events of the Passion
and to spread the Gospel after his resurrection and Pentecost.

The passage we read in Matthew functions like a hinge or linkage
between the early parts of his life & ministry and the Passion.
At this point he is guiding his disciples to focus and concentrate,
and to interpret all that they had seen, heard and experienced.

Jesus begins with a simple inquiry, vs. 13-14

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

An easy enough question, what are you hearing about who I am?,
or perhaps in the language of our approaching election cycle,
what are the opinion polls and focus groups saying about me?

What is the buzz, what are you hearing about who I am?, easy enough.

But then Jesus makes the question more intimate and personal.
Since you have been the closest to me, with me all this time, vs. 15
said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

He

The written biblical Greek is quite explicit here,
with a very strong and pointed emphasis on the word "you",
it's even repeated, "but what about you, who do you say that I am?"

The question shifts to up close and personal.

As my chosen and beloved disciples who've walked with me,
who've traveled with me and had a chance to know me,
based on that experience and our relationship, what do **you** think?

3 years, you have heard my teaching, preaching and parables,
so what does all that talking reveal to you about me?

You have seen all that I have done,
how does all that inform your understanding of me?

You have seen how I treat outcasts & other people,
what does all that suggest to you about me?

Not what have you heard other people say about me,
but from your firsthand experience, who do you say that I am?

All along Peter has been the outspoken and impetuous disciple.

He answers first maybe as leader or spokesman of the group.

Peter recognizes that Jesus was more than John the Baptist,

and more than just another prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah

and perhaps almost without thinking, blurted out, vs. 16-17

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

Peter got it right, that is the critical truth,

but he didn't figure it out with human logic and reasoning.

That is a very important truth and lesson of this passage.

The truth about Jesus Christ is revealed, not figured out.

So too it's pointless trying to argue someone into coming to faith.

**Faith comes as a gift and grace only from God
through the Holy Spirit working from within
when they're prepared to receive God's gracious love.**

Furthermore,

an authentic and growing faith isn't by calculation & intellect,

but involves the whole person, the heart and affections,

as God's work & presence are revealed within life-circumstance,

as we learn by observation, experience and inspiration

that we can trust God to bless and tie the loose ends together.

That is how God nurtures and enlarges our journey of faith.

Sometimes during our annual Session retreat, the elders are asked,

each one to tell a story about an event or experience in life

from which Jesus became more real and connected for you.

Each elder is asked to describe something they've experienced,

an event, insight or encounter with Christ

from which their faith and trust were changed and grew deeper.

Lessons about strength, courage, comfort, peace, hope & guidance

leading to times of great blessings, God's power, wonder and joy,

and during times of the terrible and most difficult

storms & seasons of pain & disaster in their lives.

And to hear those stories was powerful, wonderful and inspiring.

I don't think we talk nearly enough about the transforming power,

the wonder and blessings, the truth of God's Presence in our lives,

and the amazing signs of God at work, accomplishing in our world.

Today as a matter of your own spiritual journey of faith and growth,

I encourage each of you as a part of your private devotions,
to reflect on some of the stages, steps and turning-points
of how you came to faith, or how your faith has grown,
and consider how life's adventures have helped shape your faith.

Such life stories may not necessarily be meaningful to anyone else,
but speak to our hearts revealing God's presence, power & love,
and can make a significant difference in our faith development.

Helping us interpret & reinterpret events & stories of our lives,
are one-way God transforms our understanding & perspective,
by revealing grace, love, truth, purpose and hope from within.

Jesus blesses Peter for having recognized **the truth God revealed**,
and then, gave Peter a commission and ministry of proclamation,
that has also been passed down through the ages to us. vs. 18-19

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. 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."

Peter got it right, Jesus truly is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
The Jesus describes the Church that will be built
upon Peter and all those who declare with him, that Jesus is Lord.
That's the rock & foundation upon which Jesus will build his Church

Jesus is referring to **Peter's statement or confession of faith**,
"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
and that the church will be built upon **that truth**.

Jesus was also **predicting Peter's role in building up the church**,
which, as the book of Acts makes very clear, it was significant.

1st Acts 2 describes Peter's preaching on Pentecost, vs. 2:41-42
So those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized, and that day about three thousand
persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of
bread and the prayers.

That marks the beginning and birth of the Christian Church.

2nd Acts 10 describes Peter's rooftop vision and visit to Cornelius,
which opened the Church to receiving gentile believers, vs. 44~47.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. Those
believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out
even on the Gentiles, ... Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who
have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

These were two extremely critical events involving Peter
that helped build and establish the early Church.

Decisively, Peter played a unique and very important role
in the process of building the Church of Jesus Christ,
and that continues to be built upon by other Christians
those who like Peter, join in confessing Jesus is Lord...

... and the promise is, that even the forces of death itself
shall not prevail, be able to stand against or defeat it...

**... for there will always be those of faithful Christian community,
who believe, who walk in faith and proclaim the Gospel of JC.**

The keys of the kingdom of heaven given to Peter and to the Church
refer to the teaching-preaching ministry down through the ages,
and not Peter deciding who can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The words, "to bind", and "to loosen"
are literally, to bind or loosen, as in tying an animal to a post.

The Jewish teachers used those terms, "to bind", and "to loosen"
referring to the authority to interpret and apply God's Law,
as in binding or loosing someone from the law,
as in, deciding what the law means and how it applies...

... which for Peter was to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel.

So now, we too are commissioned, and the church's task and mission
is the bear witness, proclaim and give answer to that question,
by teaching and showing the world **who Jesus truly is,
Lord and Savior, Messiah, and Son of the living God,**
through whom the gracious love & healing of God flows.

In the final verse, Jesus gives an unexpected command, vs. 20
Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Jesus is concerned that his messianic role might be misunderstood,
for until his death and resurrection, none of his followers
grasped or understood what it meant that he is the Messiah.

So hold that truth secret for now,
until it's made more clear **after the resurrection & Pentecost**
for then you'll be equipped by the Holy Spirit to proclaim.

Today, it's really a simple question, **who is Jesus Christ to me?**,
and I believe that's the most important question we ever answer.

It's not a one-time static answer, and then we're done,
but about a progressively deepening relationship with Jesus

as we live, learn and experience toward our transformation,
as God's grace reveals and re-trains our affections.

In the end, how we answer that one question, **who do we say Jesus is?**
will in fact define, decide and determine everything else ---

- my values, goals, purpose and priorities in life
- how I interpret my life's events and circumstances
- how I deal with disasters, disappointment and failures
- how I choose to relate to other people and God's creation

Especially these days amid the challenges of the Corona-virus,
am I living by God's grace, truth, word, promises and presence?,
am I huddled in fear, or is my focus on hope and discipleship?

We answer these truthfully by examining our lives and our living,
each of us contemplating where our path in life is taking us,
and is it an adequate answer to **who is Jesus Christ to me?**

And if I continue along the life-path than I'm traveling on now,
will it take me to where I want my life to end up...
... and am I really on the right road and pathway that leads
to where I want to be and the person I want to become?

What does my life proclaim about God's grace through Jesus Christ?,
and am I letting the grace and compassion of God flow through me?,
and **would those around me recognize in me**, that Jesus is Lord?

As Paul wrote to the Christians living in Corinth (2 Cor 13:5, 1Cor 16:13-14)

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.