

## What Is Your Verdict Who is Jesus?

Text: Exodus 1:8-2:10

Romans 12:1-8 (Series A. 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 124

Matthew 16:13-20

*"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet." "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven.*

Let us pray:

If I were to ask you to stand in the corner of Sherbrook and Grand Boulevard and ask passer by Who is Jesus? You will be surprise what kind of answers you would get.

In both *art* and *literature* there are so many images of Jesus and so many ideas about what kind of person Jesus was. Even within Christianity, there are many view of Jesus. *Who is right?* The search for the historical Jesus, Jesus as he was known back then in Palestine, has only led to confusion and uselessness. What is important is who is Jesus today.

In our text today, Jesus casually asks the disciples *"Who do people say I am?"* The reply came, *"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah* (because it was believed Elijah would return) *while others say Jeremiah* (the prophet of gloom and doom) *or some other prophet."*

People who had witnessed Jesus work miracles, listened carefully when he taught about the Kingdom of God. Healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman ( the woman from Lebanon). Still, they were all guessing about this man from Nazareth really was.

- Jesus wasn't interested in what others thought of him. He got straight to the point, *"What about you?"* Jesus asked the disciples. *"Who do you say that I am?"* This question is as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago. *What is your verdict?*

What makes it even more confusing for people today is the growth of other religions within our society – all claiming to have the truth. As a result we have people saying that all religions are true, all are heading in the same direction, all speaking about peace and harmony.

Whether you are *Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Moslem, Taoist, Mahikari, Jew or Christian*, it doesn't really matter. They all proclaim good living and love toward the members of your family and your friends.

A student went to her university chaplain and asked him to explain what were the differences between Christianity and Judaism. She was in love with a Jewish student and they were thinking about getting married.

They talked about worship, rituals, festivals, customs, traditions, prayer and even God himself. Finally, she asked, "When it comes down to it, what is the one thing that makes Christians, Christian?"

The reply came, "The thing that makes us who we are is who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is Christianity. Other faiths have love; have beliefs about the good and the true. Only Christianity has Jesus." Jesus Christ is Christianity, and Christianity is Jesus Christ.

- We believe that God came in the flesh, as a Jew from Nazareth.
- We believe the way God saves is through Jesus.
- We believe that we have met God; we have met God as Jesus.
- We believe that the Jewish carpenter's son, who was born, lived briefly, died. and rose from the dead, is God who has brought us forgiveness and hope.

We, along with Peter, confess, "*You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.*" Christianity is more than knowing biblical facts, or the teachings of the church. It is more than memorizing Bible verses and Luther's Small Catechism. It is even more than doing good things for others.

It is about a relationship – a relationship between God and us. How many people have said to me that everything they had learnt at confirmation classes didn't make a great deal of difference to their lives at the time of their confirmation. In fact, a lot of what they learnt, had gone right over their heads.

It was some time later that they became aware of what Jesus was all about. Suddenly in some cases, and in others, more slowly, the light comes on. The Holy Spirit finally got through to them and they could see in full detail that their faith is all about the relationship between God and them and how this relationship now changes everything – their attitudes and their relationship with their family and others.

A man tells how he was just buying his time in a church service, looking at his watch every now and then in order to keep himself awake during the sermon. He didn't really know what the preacher was rattling on about. In the middle of his boredom, he heard just one sentence.

That one sentence grabbed him and he began to see his faith in a totally different light. He claimed that God opened his ears to hear that one sentence and things were never the same again.

When Peter made his confession, *"You are the Messiah, the son of the living God"* Jesus makes a point of telling him that this truth isn't something that Peter had worked out for himself. Jesus said, *"This truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven"*.

It's our sin-stained humanity that gets in the way and clouds our understanding of God. But God planned from the days of Adam and Eve to send a Saviour to make things right again between himself and us. God closed the gap between us; has made us members of his family at our baptism; and reaffirms his relationship with us every time we go to Holy Communion.

Whether we speak of God as we know him in the Old Testament, or see him stretched on a Roman cross, his attitude toward his people is always the same. His commitment and love are the same, and he is determined to establish a relationship with people who are unwilling even to acknowledge him.

The Bible tells story after story of God reaching to people in love. We read about his patience with the people of Israel in the wilderness and his grace toward the thief on the cross.

We love God, we believe, because God first loved us in Jesus. Christianity is not devotion to a set of rules, nor is it a set of ideas, a philosophy we might say, that leads to peace, harmony, inner peace, and good *karma*.

It is a way of life, a way of walking with Jesus, a relationship. Christians are often looked at with a degree of scepticism by those who don't know when we say we believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is present with us now, that he walks with us, and is closer to us than we are even to ourselves.

Mother Teresa was asked by a young man why she always talked about this Jesus stuff? The young man continued, he was going to work among the poor like her, do charity work, but without the Jesus baggage.

Mother Teresa quietly responded by saying something like, "Go and work 20 years or a lifetime among the poorest of the poor. Then come back and tell me how you did it. I know that the only way I have been able to do it is because of Jesus concluded by mother Teresa."

Her faith, her understanding of Jesus, gave her the ability to be a doer, a doer not just for a week or a season or a year, but for a lifetime. She was able to do work that would have turned off the bravest hearts because of her relationship with Jesus.

St. Paul reminds us that we are one body in Christ with God-given, grace-filled gifts that we are to learn to identify ~ and accept ~ within ourselves and offer in service to God and to each other.

In his words, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God...” he both cautions and encourages us to look beyond ourselves to work *together* for God's purpose; to be the welcoming all-inclusive community of the many members, with the many gifts, by the many mercies of God in Christ.

- As we stand around the deathbed of someone we love – Jesus is with us.
- As we try to decide what direction to take and what is the right decision – Jesus is with us.
- As we struggle with disappointment, guilt, and depression – Jesus is with us.
- As we grieve over change in the church, or the lack of love in our family – Jesus is with us.
- As we come before the Lord’s table—Jesus is with us.

By his grace, and only by his grace we too are able to say, "**You are the Christ!**

You make all the difference in my life.

Thanks be to God!"

Amen.

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