



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 28, 2009  
17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Mark 8:27-35  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 38:1-13  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116  
Second Lesson: 1 Peter 4:12-19  
Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

### **Who Do You Say Jesus Is?**

In your words  
In your actions

If I say the name Bill Clinton, what do you immediately think of? If I say the name George Bush, what do you immediately think of? Some of you probably think the exact same things, only not about the same person, right? A name can elicit a reaction among us. We can have certain thoughts about presidents that we agree with or presidents that we disagree with, but many people would have the same reaction to those names, just not to the same exact name. We look at people differently. We think different things about different people.

The same thing goes for the sports teams that we root for. We might think someone that plays against our team is an incredible jerk and a loser and a terrible, awful person, but as soon as he comes to play for our team, then we think he's not that bad. He's just misunderstood.

We can change our opinions of people pretty often, pretty rapidly. Some opinions we have stay a long time, but the fact that we hold different opinions about different people is not a real surprise. It's not really debatable. Having opinions of someone that might be based in fact or might be based on misinformation is exactly what we see in our Gospel today.

People had different opinions about Jesus. They all might have been saying nice things about him, but those nice things kind of missed the boat. And even the guy who got it right and said the right thing about who Jesus was didn't understand what he was saying, so his words and his actions didn't really match because his knowledge was still incomplete about who Jesus is.

So this morning, God asks us the same question. Who do you say Jesus is? And we are reminded that we say who Jesus is not only in our words, but also in our actions.

Jesus asked this question not that long after he performed some miracles that were amazing – feeding crowds and healing people. So as they are journeying, he is trying to get away from the crowd. He wants to isolate himself from the crowd so that he can do some intensive instruction of his disciples because he is about to go to Jerusalem for the last time and then die. So as they are trying to get away and as they are going, he

says to them, “Who do people say I am?” He introduces the day’s topic of discussion I guess you could say.

They tell him what the crowds have been saying. Some say he is John the Baptist, which is an interesting comment because John the Baptist had a haircut right about at the neck, right? John the Baptist had been put to death. He was long gone. So when people say, “You’re John the Baptist come back to life,” that tells you they think pretty highly of Jesus, right?

“Some say you’re Elijah,” because in the Old Testament it said Elijah would come right before the Messiah to prepare the way for the Messiah. So some thought he was Elijah come back to earth. Again, a high complement I suppose you would say, humanly speaking. They are saying good things about him. They aren’t running him down. But if all you think he is is John the Baptist or all you think he is is Elijah, you kind of miss the point.

So Jesus listens to their answers and then he asks the question, “Okay, that’s what they say. What do you say?” These are the guys that spent the longest time with him and should know him the best. They had seen things that other people hadn’t seen. Peter steps up to the plate and knocks it out of the park, right? “You are the Christ. You are the Messiah. You are the One that was promised through all the prophets. You are the One that was promised in the Garden. You are the One that was promised from the beginning of time to come and be the Messiah who would rule an eternal kingdom that would extend over all the earth.”

Jesus says, “You’re right, but don’t tell people.” And the reason why he said not to tell people is the same reason he said all the things he said at the end of the “bread of life” discourse because he knew people were looking for a bread king – someone who would just take care of the problems of the here and now. He wasn’t here to just take care of the problems of the here and now. He was here to do something much more – to take away what separates us from God, to open the gates of eternal life to people. But he didn’t want them telling the people he was the Messiah because they didn’t understand what the Messiah was yet. And that becomes crystal clear, doesn’t it?

When Jesus continues the lesson, he says, “Because I am the Messiah, here is what is about to happen to me as the Messiah. I am going to be betrayed. I am going to be handed over to the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders, and I am going to be killed. Then after three days, I am going to rise again.” He didn’t use parables. He didn’t say the messiah-ship is like a net or a tree or a mustard seed. He spoke plainly. “I am going to be betrayed. I am going to die. I am going to rise.”

The guy who had just said, “You are the Christ,” takes Jesus off to the side and begins to tell him, “No you’re not. This isn’t how it’s going to happen. You aren’t going to have this happen to you. This is wrong. Don’t do this.” Why in the world would Peter do that? He had just said, “You are the Christ.”

You have to remember that in the Old Testament there are pictures of the Christ as a king who would rule a kingdom greater than Solomon's. There are also the pictures of him as a servant who would suffer and be crushed because of our sins, and by his wounds we would be healed (as you see in Isaiah). Humanly speaking, which of those two pictures are you going to focus on if you are being ruled by Romans? It's pretty natural not to focus on the suffering servant nature of the Messiah, but to focus on the king who would reign from shore to shore and whose kingdom would be eternal and whose glory would far surpass that of Solomon's. And in Solomon's day, they didn't even bother to weigh the silver. It was just like gravel. They measured the gold in tons in Solomon's day, so they were pretty excited about the Messiah coming. But they missed the point because they focused on what they wanted to focus on.

So Jesus has to go from saying to Simon Peter, "You're right and on this confession, I will build the church" as it says in one of the other Gospels, to saying "Get away from me Satan! You don't have in mind the things of God but the things of men."

Sometimes you and I can be talking about the things of God but still have in mind the things of men. We can want a kingdom of glory here and now as opposed to a kingdom that is built upon a cross. We can want the glory that God has promised us in heaven to be our life right now. And when it's not, we can get kind of whiny about it all, can't we?

That's why Jesus brings them all together and says, "If you want to follow after me as the Messiah, that's going to involve not just sitting at my right and my left and ruling over this incredible kingdom. It's going to involve picking up your cross in this lifetime and suffering because you are my followers and because you believe I am the Messiah. And if you want to save yourself from that suffering and save your life from any kind of suffering in this world, you are going to lose it. It will end up causing you to deny me. And if you deny me, there is only one option left. That is hell." He tells them all that pretty plainly.

Can you imagine how Peter must have felt? Do you think his cheek stung from that verbal slap Jesus gave him? Do you think he paid attention a little closer from then on?

Who is Jesus? What do we say with our words? There are a lot of people around us today that are just like the people of Jesus' day that will say nice-sounding things about Jesus. "He was a revolutionary. He was ahead of his time. He was a great teacher who wanted to bring social justice and fairness and bring the downtrodden of society up to a higher level" and all these things. It sounds really, really neat, really nice, and really complementary. Even someone who believes that Allah is god will say Jesus was a great prophet. But if you stop at saying he was a revolutionary, or a promoter of social justice, or a great prophet, or a great teacher, you've missed the point. He is the One who said he is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through him. He didn't say he was here to make life better on this earth. In fact, he said, "When you follow me, your life is going to get a little tougher at times. But just realize I have come to open heaven to you."

Don't fall short by making Jesus just a great teacher or a revolutionary. Then what happens is that people view the cross as a great injustice and a dark day in the history of the world that this man ahead of his time was killed. If that's all Calvary means to you, you are in for a world of hurt.

Calvary means that Jesus fulfilled his mission. He took our sins on his back and he paid for every last one of them. Then he rose again (which he said to his disciples but they didn't appear to hear) so that we would know that our sins were paid for and that heaven is open to us. Then we would have this assurance that we have been brought back to God and our sins no longer separate us from God. That's what he came to do. That's what it means for him to be the Messiah. Don't fall short of that truth.

If you do, it will change how you act in regard to him. Then you'll view suffering for his namesake as terrible and you won't want to do it. If all he did is come to fix things up in this world and it's causing you to suffer, then you are going to want to go find someone else to follow.

Look at what we read today from 1 Peter. Look at what we saw in Jeremiah. Listen to the words of Jesus here. He tells us, "When you live for me, when you do the things I have called you to do – proclaim the Law; call people out when they have sinned and when they are separated from God, and show them that in Jesus alone their sins are taken away; not in their actions, not in their efforts, not in their attempts, not in their desire to be good and do good, but only in Jesus' perfect life and perfect sacrifice (that's the only place their sins are forgiven); when you say that to people, they aren't going to like it." They are not going to want to be called out for sin. You might have to suffer for it.

You have been out with someone. Maybe you are some place and you are having a couple of drinks and they say to you, "I think you've had enough. You better switch to pop or something." How do you react? Do you get your back up? Do you say, "Who are you to tell me anything?" Well, you know how we react when we are corrected. How do you expect people are going to receive us when we admonish with God's Law? They are not going to like it.

Even when we go to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and say, "I'm kind of concerned about you. I'm worried about you. I haven't seen you connected with God in the Word and with the Sacrament, and I don't want you to stray from God. I want you to be there with me in heaven." At times we are still going to suffer when we tell people that. We are going to have doors slammed in our face and we are going to have people not happy with us.

Jesus tells us to expect that and take up that cross and follow him. The thing is that you and I both know we haven't always done it perfectly. You and I know that we've run the other way when the cross is lying there for us to pick up. We've changed the topic. We've kept silent. We've said, "I should have. I could have. I wish I would have," but we didn't. And when we don't do what God has put us there to do, we have sinned

against our God. There's no way around it. It's not, "At least I thought about doing it." Rather it's, "I've fallen short of what my God wants me to do." That's when God takes us by the hand and leads us right back to his body and blood that was given and shed for us and says to us, "I know you don't always take up your cross. That's why I took up mine. That's why I suffered and died; so that you would be forgiven even for the times that you have failed to serve me when I have given you that opportunity."

When we see the intense love, the immense love, the incredible love that our God has for us that puts up with our failings time and time again, we are led to rejoice that we are forgiven. We are led to rejoice that our conscience doesn't have to continue to accuse us because we have fallen short. And we can say, "In Christ, I am forgiven," and then go forward seeking to pick up that cross and seeking to live for him because he has loved us so incredibly perfectly.

You and I are probably never going to have to face being thrown into a cistern and sinking up to our waste in mud like Jeremiah did, but it doesn't mean there aren't things we are afraid to face. The only way to overcome that fear is to stand a little closer to the One who took away all our sins. The closer we are him, the more often we'll be ready to pick up our cross and follow him.