

Sermons at Christ Church

A rise, for the task is yours, take courage and do it

Pentecost 12

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Two questions: Who do people say that I am? What do you say that I am? What do you know about Jesus? What can you tell about him? Jesus had ministered with his friends some of whom left everything to follow him. And then one day he gathers them together and asked them two questions. Who do people say that I am? And Who do you say that I am?

Who do people say that I am?

Often time my honest expression of my own thoughts about another person reflects my personal interaction or experience with that person. One of the remarkable jobs that professors and work colleagues are often called to do by students and other colleagues, is the honor of writing recommendation letters in support of an application for school or another position

In accepting this task, a professor or colleague cannot solely write recommendations based on what others have told him/her. Rather, an honest representation should be based on the personal interaction or experience with that student or colleague. This honest assessment offers the reader of the recommendation letter an insight into the character, values, integrity, and the general outlook of the applicant. And so even though an admissions counselor, search committee member or a human resource manager may not have directly interacted with an applicant, they often get a glimpse of the life and character of an applicant based on the testimony of others

In today's gospel, Jesus asks two questions. The first question Jesus asked his disciples solicited views of others-what do people say that the Son of Man is?

In some ways, it is like conducting a survey, and as many of you know, today's landscape is littered with public opinion polls-which tell us about how a policy, law or an individual polls within a segment of the society.

Jesus did not have the benefit of a sophisticated polling system, but yet wanted to know what people thought he was. He wanted to know what people felt about his ministry. He wanted to know whether people had a good sense of who he was, whether his ministry was making the kind of transformational impact, or if it was having any positive effect on the people.

He had done a whole lot, he had healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, provided respite for the weary, fed thousands of people and affirmed the faith of even the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by demons. He had always done what was right, what was transformational But he still wanted to know.

Understand this, you cannot control what others think or say about you. People will say what they want to say based on their experience and perception of you. They may not be totally right, but whatever you do, someone will have something to say about it. But be sure that you always do what is right, what is transformational.

There is a story of a couple who were farmers. They bought a new donkey, and on their way home from the farm, the man sat on the donkey while the pregnant wife walked. Someone saw them and asked the man how cruel can you be? How can you ride on the donkey and have your pregnant wife walk? You are such a heartless man.

The man got off the donkey and asked the wife to sit on the donkey. The wife sat on the donkey while the man walked by her side. Another person saw them and attacked the man. How foolish can you be that you walk while your wife rides on the donkey. You should ride on the donkey and have your wife walk.

The man became confused. What should I do? He asked. They decided to walk alongside the donkey. And then another person saw them and attacked them. How stupid can you be? How can both of you walk alongside the donkey? Are you not supposed to ride on the donkey? You bought the donkey to ride on it so why are you walking?

The point is, you cannot control what others say about you, and you should not even attempt to do so. But you can control what you say and do. You can always do what is right, what is transformational.

The answers Jesus got from his question reflected the way others understood his ministry, their experience of him and their understanding that he was a unique and special person. Yes, they could not figure out exactly who he was, but they knew that he always did what was right, what was transformational.

Following the first question, is the second question... who do you say that I am? I understand what others are saying but what about you? Who do you say that I am?

Peter jumps at the question and emphatically answers the question "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus does not appear surprised at Peter's answer. Although the answer was revealed to Peter from above, there is a sense that this knowledge did not come out of a vacuum. Peter's experience of Jesus gave him the credibility and the gravitas to confess who Jesus was.

Jesus chose to ask this question in a gentile enclave, and so this morning, I invite you to place yourself wherever you feel comfortable, and to ask yourself, what is my experience of Jesus? Who is Jesus to me? Who do I say that he is?

Should someone meet you on our way out of here this morning, and dares to ask that question, what will be our answer? We can answer the question in two ways, first, we can talk about all we have read about Jesus in the bible and other books or what we have heard others say about him. As a matter of fact, you do not even have to be a person of faith to answer that question. Anyone who knows something about Christianity or has read something about Christianity can at least share his opinion.

The most important answer, really, is whether like Peter, we have a personal experience of him. That our individual stories are stories of our faith journey. A journey which is always about doing what is right and transformational.

Remember, you cannot control what someone else says about you, but you can control what you do. And so long as you do what is right, so long as the right you do is informed by your faith in Christ Jesus, you also can confess that Jesus is the Messiah.

The stories of our faith journeys may not be found in books or pamphlets. They are personal stories of faith because we live those stories on a daily basis, and because we live them, they have become personal testimonies that affirm what we have come to know about Jesus and our walk with him.

See, it is not so much about what you have, what you possess or the goodness that is in you, the question is, whether you live that goodness, do you express it? Do others feel the impact of your goodness or kindness? Has it been life transforming? What do people say about you? What do you say about yourself?

As important as what others say may be, it is our personal experience, our personal walk with Christ that validates what others have said about him. How is your walk with Christ? What can you say about that walk with him?

My beloved, if you do not have a relationship with Christ. If you do not have an experience with him, I invite you to build a relationship with him, get to know him. For that is the only way that you can validate what others write or say about him. Amen.