

Worship 20.08.23

Matt 16: 13-20 – Who do you say that I am? Peter: “You are the Christ”

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.

SERMON:

This week I listened to a new podcast, new for me, that is. It’s called “Nice White Parents” a minis-series produced by This American Life and Ira Glass. A 3 minute trailer introducing the new series was released a few weeks before the initial episode. Ira Glass introduces the first full length episode by describing the uproar that took place online - listen to what he has to say¹:

(30 second clip from podcast in footnote)

Ira said: “The comments were about some imagined thing that people thought the show would be.” Assumptions - people had all sorts of ideas, none really based on knowledge of the podcast itself. Instead of waiting, listening, learning, really understanding what it was all about, their assumptions led them to all sorts of labels about what they imagined it would be.

¹ <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-book-of-statutes/id1524080195?i=1000486589125>

Our scripture today is a conversation between Jesus and his disciples - Jesus begins by asking, what are the assumptions flying around out there - what's the scuttlebutt - who do people say that the Son of Man is? Jesus doesn't ask, who do *they* say I am? He wants to hear his disciples tell him who the crowds are imagining the long awaited 'Son of Man' to be. What are the assumptions of the people? Then, he asks his disciples a much more personal question - who do *you* say that I am?

Today we continue our worship series of listening and learning from a wide range of voices.

In just a minute you'll hear a few voices reading from "*The Gospel in Solentiname*", a text which originated back in the 1970's when a group of campesinos - peasant farmers, from Solentiname, a remote set of islands on Lake Nicaragua, engaged scripture in new ways. Most Sundays, instead of a sermon, that community discussed the gospel amongst themselves, led by their priest, Ernesto Cardinal. They did it by distributing the scripture to all who could read, it was then read aloud, often by a young person, and discussed verse by verse. This rural farming community, living in the midst of the decades long civil war that ravaged Nicaragua, understood the gospel, this Good News, to have been written *for them, the poor, and by people like them*, the ordinary peasants of Jesus' time.²

Let's listen to what they have to say about our text:

Jesus 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.'

²Cardinal, Ernesto. 1976. *The Gospel in Solentiname*. Orbis publishing.

(Female 1) Tere: He saw that the people were following him, and it seems that he wants to know why.

(Male 1) William: He's interested in knowing what the people were thinking. And the people are never wrong. John the Baptist and all the prophets had denounced evil governments, right? And that's the reason the people said that Jesus was a new John or a new prophet. And the people weren't misled when they saw him as an accuser. But there was something the people couldn't yet know.

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

(Male 2) Oscar: I feel that he's now asking us the same question, in this community: Who am I in your eyes? I'm going to answer for myself, as Peter answered for himself. For me, he is one who is making me change, since I came to know him not long ago. I was a real selfish SOB (*bastard, in text*), and now, it seems to me, I'm getting to be less of one. And he has united me with others. And he's the one that keeps us united in this community. He has brought us together. What for? To unite, with groups like this, the whole world, and to change the world.

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

(Male 3) Group leader - Ernesto, the community's priest, offers some commentary and context for the group, saying - "Christ" is the Greek word *christos*, which means 'anointed' and is a translation of the Hebrew word *Mashiah*, or *Messiah*, which also means 'anointed'. This is the first time in the Gospels that Jesus is proclaimed the Messiah. Peter is saying here that Jesus has been anointed king, and that he comes to free the people and to establish the kingdom of God.

(Female 2) Olivia: That's very different from what the rest of the people were saying, that he was a new prophet. Because prophets used to announce the kingdom, while with Jesus the kingdom came.

(Male 1) Elvis: The kingdom began. But it's still a long way from being established throughout the earth.

(Male 2) Oscar: But that day is closer and closer, I say.

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.

(Male 2) Tomas: Because there are things that are learned through people. For example, one person can teach another person to read. But the wisdom of God only God teaches.

(Female 2) Rebecca: The truth is that the people couldn't know that he was the Messiah if they still weren't seeing any change. They had to think that he was just a prophet, an accuser, like there had been before. And they couldn't know either that he was the Song of God, because in the people's eyes he was just the son of Saint Joseph.

(Female 1) Guevara daughter: It seems to me that the true wisdom is that of love, and that's why it says that that wisdom is not transmitted by men but comes from God, because God is love.

(Male 1) William: What they were seeing was that Jesus was a man poorly dressed, humble, a proletarian, and in his presence they didn't see anything that seemed to be a kingdom. But Peter understood in a mysterious way that this man was no longer a prophet but the one who was coming to fulfill the prophecies of the prophets. And Peter believed in the changing of the world. That's why Jesus calls him blessed. And we too

must feel ourselves blessed, this little group here, because we too believe in the changing of the world.

(end of Solentiname reading)

For the inhabitants of Solentiname, in that time and place, in the midst of Nicaragua's revolution against the elite ruling class, there is an emphasis in trusting the voice of the people -both in their community and in the gospel narrative. Yet, as one speaker said 'there was something the people couldn't yet know.'

The people, the crowd, in the gospel reading may have been working off assumptions about who Jesus is, but Peter's response says to them that Jesus can change the world, and through following Jesus, they, too can change the world.

One of the men in the group, Oscar, heard Jesus' question as a very personal one - Who am I in your eyes? For Oscar, this is a question for all of us to consider. And like the others who spoke, Oscar sees Jesus *making* him change. Making him change, uniting him with others, bringing the community together to change the world.

For those compasinos, Jesus is uniting them to bring change - empowering them to change the world.

Who am I in your eyes?

In her book, *I'm still here, Black dignity in a world made for whiteness*, author Austin Channing Brown, describes the first visit her family made to a new church. Up until then she'd gone to a Christian school that was almost entirely white, and a church that looked the same. As an adolescent, she struggled to figure out what it meant to fully embrace her blackness.

But the morning she walked into that all black church, she writes, she met a black Jesus, and fell in love. She fell in love with a Jesus who saw the poor and sick and hurting, a Jesus who had bigger plans for her than keeping her a virgin. She met a Jesus who loved and reveled in her blackness.³

Who am I in your eyes?

For that young girl, Jesus suddenly looked like her. She saw a Jesus who understood her confusion, who had bigger plans for her.

No more living with someone else's assumptions and ideas about who Jesus was.

Maybe that day that Austin fell in love with a black Jesus, she would have echoed Oscar's response - you, Jesus, you're the one who unites us to change the world.

How about you? How might you respond to the question -

Who am I in your eyes?

Who am I in your eyes?

When we put aside our assumptions, and choose to follow him, Jesus invites us to claim his love, his transforming power, for ourselves. Peter got it - you are the Christ, the Messiah - and he didn't get it. He still had assumptions about what kind of Messiah he thought Jesus would and should be.

We don't have to get it all the way right. What this question offers us is a chance to claim who Jesus is for us, here and now.

³ Brown, Austin Channing. 2018. *I'm still here: Black dignity in a world made for whiteness*. Crown Publishing, NY.

Who am I in your eyes?

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus asks us to claim him as our own. To name him as the one who brings new life; the one who unites us to change the world, together.