

## Who is Jesus and Why is He Important?

Luke 9: 18-20

We are continuing in our sermon series based on the 10 questions of faith from Brian McLaren's book, *A New Kind of Christianity*. This week, our question is: Who is Jesus and Why is he important?

When I first read this question, my initial thought was this question would have an obvious answer for us. We wouldn't be seating here on a Sunday morning if it didn't. Except as the week continued to pass, I realized that even after 2000 years of church history, church doctrine, and church tradition, all of which tries to answer this question, even after 2000 years, we as the wider church, still haven't crafted a statement which fully captures who Jesus is for us.

Sure, we have the statement we confess Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the World but what does this statement mean for us as people of faith? How does it impact the ministry and missions of our communities of faith? How does this statement about who we claim Jesus to be, how does this statement influence our words and actions as disciples of Christ? Here and now...if someone had never heard of Jesus, who would you say Jesus is for you?

I don't mean to put anyone on the spot this morning. That was not my intent with this sermon this morning. It is just that I came to realization that more often than not, as people of faith, in response to the question, Who do we say Jesus is, we automatically repeat without really thinking about these statements, statements which confess Jesus as the Christ, statements which proclaim Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior. This week, I came to the realization that more often than not, we automatically repeat statements like these without taking the time to actually consider that these statements are our belief statements. The purpose of these statements is to try and capture what we think is Truth when it comes to our faith. Except someone else wrote them. Except someone else crafted them. In response to the question, Who is Jesus, we automatically repeat these statements without considering what they mean for us, without analyzing what they mean for our actions, how they impact our faith, without asking do they even capture our understanding of how to be a disciples of Christ here on Earth.

So this morning, I want us to spend a little time focusing on this question because usually the "Who is Jesus" question is reserved for seminary students or ministers. It is never really asked to those of us who are sitting in the pews. Which unfortunately has created an understanding within our wider faith communities that only those who are seminary trained have to deal with the big theological stuff while the rest of us can come to church for three points and poem, while the rest of

us we can come to church and someone else will tell us what we believe, Unfortunately, we have bought into the false narrative that only those who are seminary trained are allowed to struggle with answers to the big theological questions which we all encounter and experience on our faith journeys.

Again, not putting anyone on the spot here, but I hate to break it to you...faith doesn't work that way. Becoming the person God created and calls us to be doesn't work that way. We cannot abdicate the hard work of transformation to someone else and expect to absorb the results by osmosis. As people of faith, as disciples of Christ, as followers of Jesus, we need to struggle to find the language which captures what we believe. We need to engage the big theological questions. We need to discover what we mean when we say, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and we proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world. We cannot expect someone else to do the hard work of transformation for us. We cannot put off the challenging work of becoming the person God created and called us to be simply by listening to three points and a point. As disciples of Christ, we cannot do the often difficult work of Kingdom building here on Earth by expecting to go along with something someone told us to believe. It's called discipleship for a reason.

So who do you say Jesus is?

Pause....

I asked this question as part of our theology Tuesday conversation and got a few responses. So maybe to help start the conversation, I'll go first. I'll share who Jesus is for me, something I didn't do this past week because even after all the degrees and years of training, answering this question is uncomfortable for me because it is so personal. So here it is:

There was a time along my faith journey when I related more to the human side of Jesus. I understood him to be an inspiring person, a man who made a difference with his work and his works, a man who challenged the systems of oppression during his time, a man who invited sinners and saints alike to come and break bread with him.

But eventually this was not enough for my faith journey. After all, if this is who Jesus is for me, what sets him apart from the prophets of ancient Israel, John the Baptist, or even modern day prophets, like Martin Luther King or Mother Teresa.

There had to be more... And I discovered that more in the pain of losing a daughter. When I was at rock bottom, ready to give up on faith, and the fluffy, radical Jesus wasn't cutting it anymore, that's when I discovered or should I say, rediscovered the promise of the resurrection.

It wasn't just that Jesus was some guy who taught us to love our enemies and welcomed the stranger. It wasn't just that the disciples called him the Messiah. After all, during Jesus' time, there were lots of people who were thought to be the Messiah. There were lots of people who taught people a better way to live as humankind.

For me, and for so many others, what makes Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, what makes Jesus the Lord and Savior of the World is experienced through his suffering, death and resurrection because we cannot have one without the other.

Other prophets have called people to repent and become the person God created them to be. Other prophets have been martyred for speaking out against the oppressive systems of their time. Other prophets have broken the boundaries of this world, boundaries used to separate and divide. But not one single of those prophets ever had Mary Magdalene testify to new life after the grave. Not one single of those prophets ever had the early disciples experience the empty tomb and know that new life was possible.

What makes Jesus significant, what makes him important is that he showed us, as his followers, that death and darkness would not have the last word. No matter what the world may say, we have the promise of new life. The World Made

Flesh came and dwelt among us, showing us a new way to be, showing us a way that transforms lives through the power of the empty tomb. It is only by looking at the story of Jesus through the lens of the resurrection do we begin to understand who Jesus is and why he is important.

And as his followers this is what gives us hope. This is what gives us strength for the journey ahead. This is why we confess him as Christ.

“Jesus came to show us what’s possible. And so rather than give into the threat of disease, Jesus healed. Rather than surrender people to demons, Jesus showed compassion. Rather than let people starve because there’s not enough to go around, Jesus fed people who were hungry. Jesus refused to be satisfied or limited by the status quo and invites us to do the same, because if Jesus’ life and death show us how much God loves us, Jesus’ resurrection shows us that that love is more powerful than hate and fear and even death. Jesus shows us, in short, that God’s love wins.

Because...[when I proclaim, when we proclaim, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, when we proclaim him to be Lord and Savior of the World, these statements compel us] to try and live lives, filled with the sharing of God’s love, to try and become aware of the brokenness of the world but even more [than that, these statements compel us to become] aware of [how] God’s grace and the

power of the resurrection [is at work in the world, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's people].

[You see, as a person of faith, as a disciple of Christ, when I] look at all of my life – my time, my relationships, my hopes, dreams, finances, and all the rest – through the lens of both the power and possibilities created by seeing God's heart laid bare in Jesus, for me, that is what makes all the difference.

Again, I don't have all the answers. I'm still trying to figure out some of the bigger life and theological questions out myself so I'll simply offer these words, words which were shared by someone way smarter than me, so that we can all begin the journey of figuring out who do you say Jesus and why is he important because...

“ [when] Jesus asks us to confess who we believe he is, [it is not] for his sake, but rather for ours, so that we might be caught up in the power of his love and life. [so ] that the confessions we offer about Jesus in church and in our daily lives aren't [just] words of praise to God but rather are words of power that help root us in the love and possibility that Jesus offers.”

As Jesus' disciples who we claim Jesus to be is what grounds us in our understanding of how we relate to the world, how we relate to one another, even how we relate to God. As followers of Jesus Christ, who we say Jesus is impacts how we live out our faith each and every day...because it always comes back to

the suffering, death and resurrection. As disciples of Christ, we can't have one without the other. Amen.