

Who...What...Is Jesus?

Sunday, Pentecost 11, Year A

Jeremiah 15:15-21; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21 - 28

August 30, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peter...poor Peter... In last week's Gospel reading, which comes right before today's reading in Matthew, Peter was the star of the show. Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they gave many different answers, no doubt repeating what they had heard others saying about Jesus.

But, then Jesus asks them another, similar, but more pointed, question, "*Who do YOU say that I am?*" A question that all of us, as Christians, should review with constant regularity. But, Peter, inspired by God the Father, was the only one of the twelve who spoke up to give an answer, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!*" Amen, Peter! Good, answer! Way to go!

We, as God's children, love that answer. It sends a tingle up our spine and a smile to our face. Or, at least it should 😊

But, there is a lot more than simply saying the words. Just saying we are a Christian, or that we believe in Jesus, or that Jesus is the Christ, doesn't really get us anywhere. Saying I'm a pro football player, doesn't make me a pro football player. Saying I'm a great preacher, does not make me a great preacher. Saying I'm a great person doesn't make me a great person. Saying I'm a Christian does not make me a Christian.

The key to it all, is that the confession doesn't matter if it doesn't come from a heart filled with faith. And faith comes only as a gift from our heavenly Father. The gift of salvation and the forgiveness of sins through Christ, is a gift from God. And the faith that is necessary to believe that what Christ did on the cross, He did for you, that, too, only comes from God. There

is no such thing as “making a decision for Christ.” That would make salvation our work, our decision, and not God’s work and His gift.

This is a lesson that Peter is about to learn. Following his previous glorious confession, that Jesus “is the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Peter, now, returns to the Peter we know and love. Good ole ‘insert foot in mouth’ Peter.

Jesus is directing the disciple’s eyes toward God’s holy city, Jerusalem. And, for the first time, begins to tell them of what He will go through, the suffering and death, but also the resurrection.

Yet, Peter, that wonderful man, takes Jesus aside, you see he is being courteous, he doesn’t want the other disciples to hear Jesus being set straight ☺ So, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him, telling Him that those things will never happen to Him.

Oh, Peter....how the mighty have fallen. Jesus turns, and even more sternly, rebukes Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!” And I have little doubt that at those words, Peter’s eyes went wide open, his jaw dropped, his heart skipped a beat and he began to perspire. Satan? That is the most evil thing known to man. Satan is the prince of demons, the one who caused sin to come into the world...Why would he call me, Peter, Satan?...Satan is the accuser, the one who got Job into trouble, the one who tempted Adam and Eve, the one who misleads and turns people from God, the one who hinders the work of God’s people and opposes the will of God....Oh, wait a minute...that must be it right there...the one who hinders the work of God’s people and opposes the will of God ...

Yes, Jesus continues His rebuke, explaining things to Peter, “*You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*”

Way to go Peter! You've done it again. Have you ever thought how much we can learn from the mistakes of others? We should give thanks for Peter, because we learn so much from him. ☺

Of course, Peter is only trying to help. He is only trying to do the right thing. His heart is in the right place... but, that doesn't matter, because he is still doing the work of Satan, misleading and turning people away from God.

Because, while Peter "got it" that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, he did not 'get' what the Christ was supposed to be. He got the 'who', but not the 'what'. Every good Jew knew about the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, God's warrior... but they did not understand what the Christ was all about.

To them the Christ was going to be their earthly savior. Freeing them from bondage, here in this life...especially from those tyrannical and pagan Romans! And, unfortunately, there are many popular teachers and preachers who still proclaim this same false belief, today.

Because they still do not have their minds set on the things of God. Instead, they have their minds set on the things of man.

For us, as human beings, we see suffering as anti-God. It is easy to believe that the reason I have cancer, depression, the flu or a stubbed toe, is because God is punishing me. I have done something, at some point in my life, and I deserve this.

We have all been there done that, we have all thought this, pondered this, believed this at some point in our lives.

And, yes, it is true, that God does allow those things to happen. But, that is not who God is. We call those things, God's alien work, because it is a work foreign to God. It is not His

normal mode of operation. It is not who He is. God is love, as St. John says so readily in his epistles.

The fact that these things happen goes against who God is, and what He had intended for His creation in the beginning. The fact that this world is broken is not God's fault but, ours. Only we can claim sin and its effects, including cancer and a stubbed toe.

Does God allow these things to happen? Yes. Does He sometimes cause these things to happen? No doubt. But, not for revenge because you have sinned. But, in order to show His love by bringing you to repentance, humility and dependence upon Him.

God's 'alien work,' is done to lead us to God's 'proper work'. To bring us and show us who God really is; a caring, compassionate, big hearted, benevolent, gracious, generous, loving, longsuffering, faithful, Father.

When bad things happen in the world, even to those you may not like, do not point and laugh. Grieve for them. And, when they happen to you, do not blame God, but bless Him, because no suffering in this life is permanent and He has made a way for us to be with Him forever.

Do not set your mind on the things of man, but on the things of God. As St. Paul said in our epistle this morning, *“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:14–15). “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all” (Romans 12:17).*

And we see these things no more clearly than from the Christ of the cross. Who did not bring vengeance upon us for our sin, but who suffered and laid down His own life so that we may live forever...free...forgiven...without pain, suffering or death.

We know who Jesus is, He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and today we learn what He is... the suffering servant, the crucified Christ, the lover of our souls.

As God said in Jeremiah this morning, *“If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth.”* **(Jeremiah 15:19)**

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.