

Wesley United Methodist Church

September 13, 2015

"Who Is Jesus, Daddy?"

Mark 8:27-38

A woman went into a restaurant and ordered a breakfast special, "I want my pancakes well done," she said. "You need to cook them all the way through and golden brown on both sides. Use the light syrup because the regular syrup is too sweet. Make the bacon crisp and thin, not oily or soggy and put it on a separate plate. The eggs must be over-easy not broken or runny." "And would you like butter or margarine?" asked the waitress. "Oh, it doesn't matter; I'm not that picky."

Last week we came to the "All You Can Eat Buffet of God's Grace" as we shared in the Lord's Supper. In today's Scripture we're given a menu of sorts. We're given a menu and the we're to make a choice.

Today we examine the menu of answers and choices about Jesus, we need to have open eyes as we make that choice. And we need to examine the passage with three questions: Who Am I? Who Is He? Who Are You?

Remember the game "Who Am I?" or twenty questions, where you had to guess the identity of a historical or fictional person based on the "yes" or "no" answers to the questions you asked. There used to be a couple of TV game shows like that. "To Tell The Truth" where three people would enter and all solemnly say, "My name is Joe Schmo." Then the host reads an article about his life. then the questions would begin and at the end, the panel would have to guess.

Then there was "I've Got A Secret" hosted by Gary Moore. "Will the contestant sign in please." It was sort of a reverse of the Who Am I? In this one, you knew the person's name, but there was something else you had to guess about him or her. Their unusual job, a hobby, the item he or she invented. Something like that.

Today's passage has always reminded me of those game shows. As they are traveling from village to village proclaiming the Good News and healing those in need, one day Jesus stops, turns to his disciples and asks, "Who Am I?" Actually he says: "Who do people say that I am?" That was the question on everybody's mind. That was the one thing everybody wanted Jesus to answer. That was the question gossips and scholars alike wanted an answer to. Inquiring minds wanted to know.

You remember the answers. It sounded like a menu of choices.

Scripture doesn't say who spoke first, but I am going to give them names. It doesn't really matter but I think it was probably Simon the Zealot, he said: "Well, some of them say you're John the Baptist reborn and carrying on his ministry." That's when Thaddaeus popped up and said, "Others say you're Elijah, the one who is supposed to tell us the Messiah is coming." And the Judas Iscariot said, "Still others think you're just one of the prophets."

Then it got silent. It was a nervous silence because each of them had their own understanding of who Jesus was buried deep in their hearts and minds. But they had probably never voiced it before, even to themselves. They weren't sure Jesus even wanted to hear what they thought and felt and believed. Just when the silence was getting painfully uncomfortable, Jesus asked another question, "But who do you say that I am?" That was when brash, bold Peter stepped out in faith again, Like walking on the water with Jesus, he spoke out saying, "You are the Messiah." I think there was a collective sigh because Peter had voiced what everyone was thinking. The question is still pertinent today because people are still asking that very same question about Jesus.

It's a question we have to answer as well. It's fine and dandy to list the menu of options but at some point we have to answer the question for ourselves. "But who do you say that I am?" Or "Who Is He?" And how we answer will determine our relationship with God and how we live our lives.

If we say he is John the Baptist returned then we can write him off as some weirdly dressed kook with an even weirder diet who we can dismiss as a radical and a fanatic, crying in the wilderness. And if we dismiss him then he has no real authority in our lives.

If we say he is just one of the prophets, then his words do have some authority because we know that prophets are from God. But prophets always seemed to speak in allegories and have all kinds of hidden and double meanings. Their messages never seemed that urgent. It was good moral teaching but it just didn't have enough urgency about it for us to really pay attention and act upon it.

If we say he is Elijah, well then there is some very real authority in his message. Elijah is the prophet who will open the door, so to speak, for the coming of the Messiah. Elijah is the one who will announce the coming of the Messiah. There was an urgency as he calls everyone to get ready. There is an urgency but there isn't any immediacy. We know the Messiah hasn't come yet, so we've still got plenty of time. All we have to do is get ready.

So you see, the choice is ours but it affects everything we do. That's why Jesus asked: "But who do you say that I am?" And why we ask ourselves: Who Is He?"

Years ago I read a story about a waitress at a restaurant who was taking orders from a couple and their young son. She was one of those veteran waitresses who'd seen everything. She would never show outright disrespect to her customers, but she made it evident by her unhurried pace and her level stare that she fears no mortal, not even parents. She jotted on her order pad deliberately and silently as the father and mother gave their luncheon selection and instructions as to what was to be substituted for what, and which dressing changed to what sauce. When she finally turned to the boy, he began his order with a kind of fearful desperation. "I want a hot dog-" he started. And both parents barked at once, "No hot dog!" The mother went on, "Bring him the mashed potatoes, and the beef, both vegetables, a hard roll, and..." The waitress wasn't even listening. She said to the youngster, "What do you want on your hotdog?" He flashed an amazing smile, "Ketchup, lots of ketchup, and-and bring a glass of milk, please." "Coming up," she said as she turned from the table, leaving behind her the stunned silence of utter parental dismay. The boy watched her go. Then he turned to his father and mother and with astonished elation said, "You know what? She thinks I'm real! She thinks I'm real!"

Now I don't necessarily condone what the waitress did, but what she did made that little boy's day. It made him feel real. When we answer this question like Peter, when we accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of our lives, then all that he taught, all that he promised, all that he preached becomes real in us. When we answer the question "Who Is He?" like Peter, it determines who we are.

And that leads us right into the final point. "Who Are You?" Who we say Jesus is makes a difference in our lives and in our actions.

A local funeral home in one city placed a larger than life nativity scene on their front lawn each Christmas. The scene is complete with sheep, goats, and three huge camels. Several years ago, a young father and his two daughters stopped at the funeral home to take a closer look at the figures. The father talked about the animals as they walked around looking at the figures. Finally, one of the daughters asked, "Who is that baby, Daddy?" Her father replied, "Oh, that's Jesus." His daughters continued to stare into the manger at the face of the baby. "Who is Jesus, Daddy?" The father struggled with that question, never really able to answer the question. They loaded back up and headed for home. During the next few days he struggled over and over with that question. "Who is Jesus, Daddy?"

The following Sunday he insisted that everyone attend church, they were going to find out about this Jesus. After the service, they made an appointment with the pastor. He went to their home and shared with them the story and belief about Jesus as Savior and Lord.

As a result of the meeting in their home, both parents and children started attending Sunday School. Later they accepted Christ, joined the church and became one of the strongest and most joyful families in the church. It all started with something as simple as a manger scene in front of a funeral home, and a child's question. How we answer that question makes all the difference in the world and in our lives. How we understand that question determines our understanding of the authority of Scripture, the authority of God, the urgency and immediacy with which we need to answer.

One more waitress story. There was a waitress who couldn't get a smile out of one of her customers for love nor money. The woman was dour, depressed and dejected all through dinner. And the food wasn't really all that bad. As the lady paid her bill and was leaving, the waitress said, "Have a nice day!" And the woman responded snappy, "I'm sorry but I've made other plans."

What are your plans? How will you answer the questions raised by Jesus? Today and every day, you're given the menu and asked to make a choice. And, I am sure, you won't hear, "Do you want fries with that?" But you are given a choice. How you answer is extremely important. Who do you say he is? And does it show?