



St Andrew

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sermon: Pastor Lisa Stoen Hazelwood – Sunday, September 23, 2018

I did a little crowd sourcing for this week's sermon....through the E News and on Facebook.....and I got a LOT of feedback.....from many of you! Thank you!

I guess the question got people thinking..... It's a question that echoes the one Jesus asks of his disciples in today's scripture reading from Mark. I asked, "Who is Jesus for you?"

Now I realize that even the question is going to make some of you uncomfortable..... and I suspect the diversity of answers might make others uncomfortable.....which probably makes this a question worth asking..... When Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?".....his disciples came up with more than one answer....."You are the prophet, Elijah" or maybe John the Baptist....." When he asks again, with a different twist.....there's silence.....probably because the disciples were thinking the same things other people did.....that Jesus might be Elijah, returned, or John the Baptist..... Those were the categories he fit into for them..... But then, Peter pipes up with something completely crazy..... maybe....just maybe, Peter thought, you are "the Messiah."

In a black and white world, we tend to seek ONE answer to any question.....but I wonder if that's enough to get our heads and hearts around who Jesus really is for us. He seems to mean a variety of things to all of us here.....the diverse followers Jesus has assembled in this room..... How much more would answers

differ when we include people from around the world; in a variety of cultural contexts.....much less through time and history.....????

Jaroslav Pelikan wrote a book called Jesus through the centuries in which he highlights the aspects of the Christ that have come to the fore at different times in different places. Fascinating book. Just a glance at the table of contents tells you everything you need to know.....it includes chapters on Jesus as Rabbi, Jesus as the Divine and Human Model, Jesus as the Christ, crucified; Jesus as the light to the Gentiles; Jesus as the King of Kings; Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Soul; Jesus as the Liberator; and Jesus, Man Who Belongs to the World among many others!!!!. All contain scriptural references and images that reflect the needs and desires of different people in different times.

At St. Andrew we have an unusually wide range of perspectives on everything from faith and belief to politics and social issues..... We try not to create obstacles for those seeking to become part of our communitywhich means no one has to check off a list of beliefs in order to worship with us.....You don't have to agree to particular policy positions, or vote a certain way. There is no theological litmus test that will determine whether your views of faith are a match! We know that people come into this community from a variety of entry points....with diverse religious histories and a variety of experiences. We come with knowledge and practices that in many ways are uniquely our own. The church is like a "big tent" as the political metaphor goes.....

Sometimes, in a big tent, where many are welcome, there's some friction. There are certainly differences of opinion. Sometimes we say too much.....sometimes we say too little about what matters most to YOU....

Especially now, it seems to me that learning to live with people who think differently than you is vital. And church is one place where we get to practice doing that.

Coming out of the visioning process we did a year and a half ago..... one of our emphases for the next two years is going to be learning to have conversations across those differences; We want to learn how to live in an increasingly polarized world by practicing important conversations with people who think differently than us. We want to learn how to listen and learn from one another.....We all come from different backgrounds, we've had different religious experiences and we've come from different traditions----each of which has its strengths and shortcomings. And we also bring who we are and what we've done; what we've learned and how we experience God. We bring our jewels and we bring our baggage. And today I want to share some of the jewels.....as we respond like the disciples did when Jesus asked them two thousand years ago.....who they thought he was.

So think for a momentabout how you'd answer..... **Who do YOU say Jesus is?** Here are some of the answers I received....I couldn't share all of them, but thank you for them, nonetheless.....

One of you said: I like to think Jesus is my brother...my divine superhero brother who never leaves my side. Like God, he is amazing and is responsible for all the truly incredible miracles that are our lives... He is always there to guide our decisions and to share our happiness and pain.....so I feel like God is my all-knowing Father and Jesus is my wonderful understanding brother.

“Jesus is the facilitator that assists us in being better people. The teacher. He went around the country giving workshops and demos on how to better our relationship with God and our fellows – he's the real founder of AA.”

“Jesus is the key for the unexplainable void that you feel in your life. Jesus is the motivation to be good, because He was pure goodness. It’s incredibly difficult to wrap our minds around the fact that God loves us like a parent loves a child, but Jesus is that proof.....he was God’s only son, and he softened God’s heart in the way that only a child can. And that was done for each of us, because we are his children too.”

One of you shared a thought from Rudolf Steiner: “In some ways [Jesus is] the ultimate tour guide if we choose to ask directions! Currently in our human evolution, we are very independent beings. It takes more conscious work to connect to this spirit and each other. Jesus, for me, is that connection. “To me, Jesus is my inspiration to do the right thing.”

“Jesus is the one true Son of God. He is teacher, healer, compassionate, passionate. He is my best friend. The way, the truth, and the life.”

“Maybe "who" isn't the question, but "what" or "where.”
We always think of Jesus as a "person" but isn't he more of a spirit now? If that is the case, wouldn't that put Jesus around all the time, in every situation?”

Along the same lines, one of the children in our congregation wrote.....Jesus is like "A ghost." I think she meant because we can't see him exactly....but we know he's there.....”

“I have to start with my understanding of GOD. I believe GOD is a supernatural spirit entity which I will never be capable of understanding or explaining. My faith is simple, GOD is. Being supernatural spirit He may present Himself in anyway He may. I believe Jesus was this vessel at his time to try to demonstrate that GOD is to the natural people of that time. I believe GOD is in all beings as the spirit we either

recognize or not. GOD created man in his likeness and I believe it is in that spiritual likeness that lets us all make that claim no matter what we look like.”

Someone else said, “Jesus is kind of like a National Grid solar farm that supplies all the love energy we could ever need. It is free and ever accessible to all.”

“He is my constant. A faithful reminder of sacrifice and staying the course for what you believe.” “He is who I turn to when I need something or feel alone. He is the one who is constantly walking beside me and guiding me when I really don't recognize His presence.”

“Yeshua, you are my Brother, one with me and one with Source. You are one with all humans who have ever lived. You are an Avatar and a Boddhisatva. You incarnated to show us how to live and to teach us that God is love and overlooks our mistakes, choosing to see in us only love and light.”

“You came to teach us forgiveness and to show us that we were created through Divine love. You are the Teacher, teaching us through your resurrection that we are first and foremost Spirits in Spacesuits, ie. Spirits having a human experience, not humans having a spiritual experience.”

“Who do I say Jesus is and was? Someone who stood up to the day's hypocritical figures of authority and riches. Someone who said to love everyone equally and love others more than you love yourself. Someone who said to help those who are in need, despite their backgrounds, and not put them, or their children in cages.”

Who is Jesus today? Same being as he always was.

Someone who rejoices in Love, and Peace, and cries for those suffering at the hands of their brother. Someone who even loves hypocrites, when they recognize it in themselves and ask forgiveness, instead of judging others.

And from a poem written by one of our partners:
“Who do you say that I am?...
You say who I am by what you do.”

Jesus IS clearly different things to different people at different times in history. One aspect comes forward, another recedes. One is prevalent in the Eastern Church, another in the Western. Poor people in Latin America need Jesus the suffering God but also the Liberator at a certain time of struggle. Asian Christians renew the church with an explosion of connections to Jesus by the Spirit.

Those coming to Jesus from other traditions bring what they have experienced.....with them. And those of us who have grown up with traditional language for who God is and Who Jesus is....may be uncomfortable with language that isn't our own. But we, too, experience God, and experience the Christ differently at different times in our lives.

Perhaps we see the face of the incarnate, crucified Jesus when we walk through times of pain and struggle. We may need to know the power of the resurrected Christ when we lose a loved one and claim the promises of life that lasts forever. We need the justice of Jesus when we see injustice in the world. When we long to be included and accepted, we choose the radical Jesus who broke down barriers, who changed the rules of who is “in” and who is not..... who only saw a brother or sister Child of God

Perhaps the Messiah Jesus is in any particular time and place in history the Messiah God's people.....most need. I hope, that

rather than disturbing us, the many faces of Jesus.....might bring comfort and might strengthen us in our faith. This might also help us, as one partner pointed out in her email this week, in sharing our faith with others. To do so, she suggests, "we have to first listen to the other person, listen for their true need, before we try to say who Jesus is. Then we can share that part of Jesus we know they are longing for..... to the grieving, comfort; to the lonely, constant presence with us; to the guilt-ridden, Savior; to the addict, Victor over chains that bind, and so much more.

May Jesus be the Messiah you need today and always.
Amen.