

Time to Shine

Matthew 16:13-18

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.

When I was in school –one thing that terrified me was a pop quiz. There is no way to study for a pop quiz - they come out of nowhere. You walk into class in a good mood and then you hear those dreaded words, “Please clear your desk.” You know it’s coming.

But, really, those quizzes just affect your grade – there are other pop quizzes that can change your life. Your significant other asks, “where is this relationship going?” Your supervisor at work stops you in the hallway and says, “bring me up to speed on that project.”

We have a pop quiz moment in our scripture today.

Jesus is in the region of Caesarea Philippi which is on the northern border of Israel.

Jesus and the disciples had traveled up there to safety after John the Baptist was killed.

Caesarea Philippi may not look like much today, but in the days of Jesus it was a spectacular city. Caesarea Philippi was a melting pot of religion. It was littered with the temples of the Baal gods. There were temples to the Roman gods, and even temples for the worship of Caesar. There were temples to the Greek gods as well.

And the Greeks believed that the god Pan was born in the cave above Caesarea Philippi so they worship him there. And in that cave there was also a pit that ancient people thought was the portal to the underworld – so they called the cave the “gates of hell.”

So, it is as though Jesus wants to put his identity and ministry in contrast to all the other gods who have been worshiped here. And he asks the central question of humanity: **Who do you say that I am?**

Do you notice that this isn’t a beginner’s question? The disciples had been with Jesus a long time, traveling with him and witnessing his miracles and his teachings. They probably had long conversations with him about God, life, love, the kingdom of God, you name it. But this is the first time Jesus asked – to them who is he? Jesus had called them to be his disciples and they followed. But now he wants to know – what have you experienced? What have you learned? Who do you say that I am?

When you choose to follow Jesus, you will come to know Jesus. Jesus wants us to be followers of him so we can have a deep and abiding relationship with the One who came to save this world – so that he can be OUR savior.

Who do you say that Jesus is – to you? And do you act like it?

What we DO reveals what we truly believe. How we live – reveals who Jesus really is to us.

Who do you say I am? That is the most relevant, the most life-changing question that confronts us today. Wherever we turn in life we are faced with the implications of our answer.

But today – we aren't called to answer who does Peter say that Jesus is, or who do our parents say that Jesus is – no – the big question for us is – who do you say Jesus is? And if you say that he is your Savior – do you live as his disciple?

Jamie Buckingham, in one of his books tells about a pilot in Ecuador who was in a plane crash that could have been avoided.

This pilot was flying a Cessna 206. The wheels of his plane had barely left the wet jungle airstrip when a passenger, sitting in the co-pilot's seat because the plane was full, panicked. The pilot had done this many times before and was confident he would clear the huge trees towering at the end of the little airstrip.

But the passenger had never taken off from a jungle airstrip. Looking up, all he could see were the onrushing trees filling the windshield. "Why doesn't the pilot pull back on the controls?" he thought in terror. Afraid they were going to crash, the passenger tried to help. He grabbed the controls and pulled back. But it doesn't work that way. You have to build up speed before you point the nose skyward or the plane will stall.

When the passenger pulled back on the controls, the airplane pitched upward, lost critical airspeed and began to settle toward the jungle below. The pilot grabbed the controls and tried to get the nose down. But it was too late. Crash. No one was killed. But all were injured. The pilot suffered the greatest injuries.

Buckingham said, "It really is hard to keep our hands off the controls."

Do we follow Jesus, trust Jesus, obey Jesus or do we want control?

Who is Jesus for you – is he the Christ, the Son of the Living God – is he Lord of our life? Is he the Savior – is he your Savior? Our answer to that question isn't lived out one day a week – our answer to that question is heard every day – all day.

So, you know the Lenten question for the day - Who do you say that Jesus is in your life? After all - you've heard the words of Jesus just like the disciples did. Are you living up to the call of discipleship as he has described it? Where could you do better? How could you, as busy as your life is, live it more completely for God? Are your priorities where they need to be?

In Lent – as we move our way toward Easter - the question we each need to answer is this – Who do you say Jesus is?