

"Which Jesus Is Your Jesus?"

Mark 8:27-35

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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

When you confess one of the three Creeds of Christendom, declaring your belief in the LORD God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - one of the questions that you are answering with your statement of faith is, "Which god is your God?" A not uncommon response heard is, "Oh, they're all the same God. We all worship the same God, right?" Why even within the religious body known as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod there are clerics, and their followers, who put forth a similar assertion, saying, "The Muslim god is also the true God (there IS only ONE TRUE GOD, right?)." But this is most certainly not true, and the Church, and each member therein, does well to recognize this lie for the heresy that it is, to expose such liars for the heretics they are, and to discern their invitation to become their disciples when they use the little word "right" - as in, "The Muslim god is also the true God (there IS only ONE TRUE GOD, right?)."

Such a contemporary setting in these latter days provides the Christian with the blessed opportunity to confess the faith should he or she be asked by someone, "Which god is your God?" There came a day when the followers of the carpenter's son heard a similar question from Him. Please listen to the Gospel Reading for today and ponder the question ...

... Which Jesus is Your Jesus?

"And Jesus and His disciples went out to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, 'Who do men say that I am?' And they answered Him saying, 'John the Baptist, and others, Elijah, but others, one of the prophets.' And He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.' And He charged them that they tell no one about Him. And He began to teach them that it was necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spoke the Word plainly; and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning and beholding His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind Me, Satan, because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man. He called the people, with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to follow after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his soul will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's sake will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, so also the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Jesus is on the road to the cross where He will be the Sacrifice of the ages, will die for the sins of the world, defeat the devil and conquer death itself. On the road, His disciples walk with their Lord, thus becoming a "synod," for this is what the word "synod" means - "a walking with" someone along the same way. This particular synod, on its way to Caesarea Philippi, is walking the way of the cross with Jesus. As this "Jesus synod" travels in His Presence and follows the Master, the disciples are catechized; that is, they are asked questions.

"Who do men say that I am?" Now, with such a question, Jesus is not asking the disciples to tell Him what the names are that people use to refer to Him. No, He is asking them to tell Him who others confess Jesus to be. It is of great benefit to ponder the answers He received from His disciples, for we are to make application to what others confess concerning Jesus today.

First, His followers "answered Him saying, 'John the Baptist.'" John was well known as the Bible tells us that "there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). Even Herod "feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he (Herod) heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly" (Mark 6:20). Indeed, of His cousin, Jesus declared, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

Then John was martyred for the sake of the Word. This is the prophet who pointed the people to Jesus, proclaiming Him "The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). So, as the days went by, "Jesus' name had become known. Some said, 'John the Baptizer has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him'" (Mark 6:14). Thus it was quite fitting that, in response to Jesus question - Who do men say that I am? - the disciples "answered Him saying, 'John the Baptist, and others, Elijah, but others, one of the prophets.'" That is quite a compliment for any mere man, or even for the greatest man born of man and woman.

Jesus is true man, but more than man; Jesus is a prophet, but more than a prophet. John knew this and declared when asked who he was, "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20). To believe, teach and confess that Jesus is a prophet like John and nothing more is to deny that He is the LORD God Almighty - to deny the creeds of Christendom. Disciples who deny the Incarnation and Divinity of Jesus are no longer a part of the synod that walks with Jesus. They become religious disciples of a different Jesus ... for example the Muslim Jesus, or the Jehovah's Witness Jesus, or the historical Jesus of Liberalism, or the mythical Jesus of secular academia.

"... John the Baptist, and others, Elijah, but others, one of the prophets." The other great prophet of the Old Testament is Moses - the man who brought the Ten Commandments down from the thunder-struck mountain where the holy, perfect, just, righteous God etched the "Thou shalt" and the "Thou shalt not" in cold, unforgiving tablets of silent stone. Is Jesus a new Moses, sent by God to write your name on the chalkboard and add check-marks each time you sin? - or come down to oversee the stoning of the woman caught in adultery? - or to find out who's naughty and nice? - or to taunt you with the impossible "What Would Jesus Do?" admonition of modern-day legalists? - or to burden the backs of man with new violations of new laws?

This, according to the Bible, is not what Jesus came to do. "The Law was given by Moses; grace and

truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). To mold Jesus into a new Moses is to confuse Law and Gospel; ultimately denying the Good News of Jesus taking away the sins of the world and being the Sacrifice for all transgressions. It makes the reason for the Son of God coming into this world to be the Law-Giver instead of the Sin-Bearer. Disciples who deny the Atonement of Jesus are no longer a part of the synod that walks with Jesus. They become religious disciples of a different Jesus ... for example the Legalistic Jesus, or the Mormon Jesus, or the Purgatory Jesus.

Time prevents us from identifying this Jesus and that one. People today have fashioned a Jesus of their own and they are many: the Marxist Jesus, the Gay Jesus, the "It's Okay to Sin" Jesus, the non-alcohol Jesus, the "in your face" Jesus, the "in your heart" Jesus, the Jesus of the rich and famous, the New Age Jesus, and ... well, you get the idea.

So you quickly perceive the necessity of the question, "Which Jesus is your Jesus?" Or, as the Savior "said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" Ah, now that makes it personal and such a question calls for one to confess one's belief, as in the creeds, "I believe in ..." The first to reply and make the good confession was Peter, "You are the Christ!" Well done, Petros! This is most certainly true! You have made the good confession in the presence of God and these witnesses! Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God ... true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man born of the Virgin Mary.

After the Christ charged them not to tell anyone of this yet, "He began to teach them that it was necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." In order for salvation to be earned for all people, the Christ was going to suffer, die and rise again. This is the way of the cross and those who would remain in the synod of the Savior must remain steadfast in this confession of Christ's person (who He is) and His work (what He has accomplished ... atonement and resurrection). Dearly beloved, this is good news ... this is The Good News ... The Gospel. Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word. I mean, who would ever give this up and depart from this truth?

Each one of us is capable of denying the truth of the faith and Peter demonstrates it himself. This Jesus was not the Jesus that Peter had in mind. Give me a fighting Jesus and if not, give me a Jesus I can defend and die for if need be. Peter would do whatever it took to prevent the Master from going on with what was being taught to the disciples. Or, in the words of the Scripture, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him."

God would not have Himself diverted from the way of the cross. Peter was trying to sidetrack the synod with an agenda conceived in sin. The Christ would not permit this and the reaction was swift and for the benefit of both Peter and the disciples of all ages. "Turning and beholding His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind Me, Satan, because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man.'"

These two responses by Jesus ... the commendation of the individual when confessing the truth and the scathing rebuttal of the individual when denying the faith ... is a loving practice of the Christian. "This double maintenance of great veneration for the fathers and the unrelenting criticism of their doctrine where it departed from the Word of God characterizes the Lutheran understanding of the church's teachers as fathers of the church" ("The Lonely Way II" by Herman Sasse, p. 229).

Then, as Jesus and those who walked with Him continued on the way to Calvary. "He called the

people, with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to follow after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his soul will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's sake will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, so also the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'"

So, "Which Jesus is your Jesus?" is really no different a question as "Which God is your God?" What a joy to hear the truth and by the Holy Spirit working through the Word, be given the gift of faith to confess and to bear witness to the Christian faith. Amen.