

## Sermon for August 24, 2014

Who do you say that I am? That question is just as important for us today as it was when Jesus asked the first disciples. And I know that there have been times in my life when I'm like the crowds and Jesus in no more than a great prophet. You know a good man whose example I want to follow; someone who inspires me—at least that's how I act some days.

My words on Sunday of who I believe Jesus to be don't always align with my actions the rest of the week. I have a feeling that might be true for some of you also. Who we confess Jesus to be with our words on Sunday mornings doesn't always show up in our actions the rest of the week. Does what we do in our relationships, with our money, our time and our energy during the week align with who we confessed Jesus to be in our lives on Sunday morning?

Part of that is because like Peter we don't really know we mean when we confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And here's a spoiler alert for next week—while Peter may have said the right words; he had the wrong meaning! And we can't be too hard on Peter because he was just going along with what he'd been taught about what the Messiah would do when he came.

For centuries the Jewish people had been taught that the Messiah would be a great warrior and come and defeat Israel's oppressors. Jesus doesn't help matters any when he asks the disciples these questions while they are in Caesarea Philippi a stronghold of the Romans; the current oppressors of the nation of Israel. We can almost feel the disciples' excitement building as they begin to think that Jesus could be the one to finally free them from the

oppression of the Romans! But as we will find out more next week; that's not the type of Messiah that Jesus is.

So what does it mean when we confess Jesus as the Messiah because I believe one of the reasons we don't live out what we confess is because like Peter we don't really know what we are confessing. I love the words to the Nicene Creed: "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father." The Church has struggled for centuries defining just who Jesus is and what God in love has done through him. But when we confess something we don't understand it can make the wild and unpredictable God tame and safe and something we can put in a box to be pulled out when we want. Anyone who has experienced God knows that God is anything but tame and safe!

So who is Jesus the Christ the Son of the living God? How can we put into words what the Messiah means to us so that we can explain it to our children, our friends, or to anyone we meet? Let me share with you what Jesus the Messiah means to me and hopefully these words will start you thinking about what the Messiah means to you.

I believe that Jesus is God's means of showing us just how much God loves us and all of creation. When we think of God it can be so overwhelming that it's hard to connect to God in a personal way. Jesus allows us to connect to God and to see God's heart; a heart that breaks whenever someone feels so depressed that they take their own life; a heart that breaks when God's children take

advantage of one another; a heart that breaks when God's children neglect one another.

Jesus show us how God can be found in the least likely of places—as a baby in a manger; as a crucified criminal on a cross; in the muck and mire of our everyday lives; in all of our pain and suffering.

Many of us have heard the phrase that God loves us as we are; but God's love is more than that—it's showing us in Christ what is possible. Jesus wouldn't give in to disease, so he healed. He wouldn't give in to the idea that there wasn't enough to go around, so he fed those who were hungry. He wouldn't let the demons have the last word, so he showed compassion. He wouldn't let us die in our sins any longer so he humbled himself, trusting in the promises of God and died on a cross so that through his death and resurrection we too will have life eternal.

When we confess who we believe Jesus to be it is for our sake for those words give us the opportunity to be caught up in his life and his love and in the endless possibilities that he offers to us. As you can see by Peter's example it takes some time for all of this to sink in and so we confess week after week who we believe Jesus to be and how that belief can shape our lives; not only on Sunday mornings but throughout the whole week.