

September 13, 2020

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8:27-29

All of us struggle to have the relationship with Jesus that we would really like to enjoy. A lot of our struggle has to do with who we think Jesus truly is. If we think of Jesus as a great teacher, a healer, a provider, or a friend then our relationship with him will reflect those beliefs. But, if we think of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God as Peter confessed him to be, then our relationship will, I think, be completely different

In our context for today Jesus asks the twelve, **"But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"** Peter's resounding answer, **"You are the Christ!"** should define his relationship with the Master. But in the rest of this chapter Mark makes it clear that Peter's confident confession and Peter's doubting faith are far apart. I believe that most of us can identify with Peter's struggle.

On the one hand Peter absolutely believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But on the other, Peter struggles to surrender everything in his life to that faith. We are all, I think, a whole lot like Peter.

I believe that most of us, maybe even all of us, struggle to live our faith in the nature of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus shows us clearly what our response has to be. He says, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose his it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."**

If you and I really and truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God then our only reasonable response is the absolute surrender of our everything. To give our lives over completely to the control of Jesus and to willingly follow him wherever he might lead us is a severe challenge.

Regardless of what we might claim there are still areas in our lives that we have not surrendered to Jesus' control. But if we have laid down our lives for him those areas must, by definition, be surrendered too. That is, I believe, the nature of our lives as believers. He calls us to lay our lives down completely for him, and as our faith grows we surrender more and more to his control.

That sounds beautiful and it is. But it is also hugely difficult because we are all driven to hold on to control over our own lives and we do not want to give that up. We can talk about following Jesus wherever he leads with complete confidence and perfect peace, but most of us struggle to really do so.

If we take honest stock on our lives there will be areas where we are not yet living surrendered. Maybe it has to do with our family; our children or grandchildren. Maybe that area that we are still trying to control is our possessions. Maybe that area is our career. Maybe that area is our health. Maybe that area is... If we honestly consider our own lives all of us will find those areas that have yet to be surrendered. So, what do we do with them?

Jesus calls us to give up our lives for him. If we are holding on to some aspects of our lives and have not yet surrendered them to his absolute control, what can we do? I am convinced that we must, in the end, absolutely and completely surrender all of our lives to him. And, I believe that the surrender he requires will be easier when we honestly accept that we do not in fact have, and really never have had, control of any aspect of our lives. We would like to think that we can control what happens to our families and friends. We cannot. We think we can hold on to our possessions and protect them. We cannot. We think we can keep our health, and our youth, and our... We cannot.

The truth is God, and God alone has control. Our surrender to Jesus, the Christ, the Son of our God, is really just our absolute acceptance of that reality. In the end, laying down my life for Jesus is really just accepting this truth: My life has always been God's to control. He is, after all, God.

