

Reflection for September 15, 2024 – We Know Who We Are

Inspired by Mark 8:27-38

Who Do You Say That I Am?

I'm male, about 5'8^{3/4} inches tall. I'm just a little over 71 (that's 3 score + 11). Soaking wet I'm about 145 pounds (or 65.8 kg) last I checked, which surprised me. I have gained some weight since living in Peachland. It's either the air or all those cookies I get from the B Bin. Living here agrees with me.

I have grey hair, mostly balding. From what I have been told I have a nice-looking beard. I wear glasses. I have since I was 18 months old. That is my outside appearance.

On the inside most people tell me I have a good sense of humour, am generally fair-minded and mostly patient. I have been also told I have a gentle calming presence, which is nice to hear. I believe I am kind and generous. I think I am approachable, sensitive and most of the time a pretty good listener.

I don't think you would be surprised if I said I had a strong faith. I find the Creator's ubiquitous gifts surrounding me, offering me confidence and assurance in life when I need it most. The Christ in me pushes my pursuit of justice, fairness and compassion.

Who Do You Say That You Are?

You can all describe your outward appearance relatively easily. Perhaps you are tall, perhaps average height. Women know your shoe size, and your dress size. Men know their waist size but have no clue about their inside pant seam length. You know what you weigh (although some of you would rather not). And there is a whole bunch of other stuff you know about yourself.

But do you know who you are on the inside? How would we describe you? Mild mannered or feisty? Quiet and withdrawn or really eager and outgoing? Helpful, pastoral, kind, generous, thoughtful, sensitive, sincere, friendly?

I know you all possess those traits and more. You are a cadre of super caring individuals. And, while we all experience God and God's spirit of love differently, I know you all possess a sense of awe and wonder about our creator. And you connect with that spirit of gentleness, the presence of compassion and love differently. But you do connect.

Who Do You Say That Jesus Is?

You all know Jesus. I can't say how exactly, but you know the Christ as present in the here and now. It is a resurrected presence that wills us forward in solidarity to care for each other in an often-chaotic world, and for a people that are often broken. The Christ in us inspires us to be the good shepherds in society, the answer to a needed prayer, the antidote to heartache.

We are here because we believe in Jesus. We know who he is. We strive to be like him. Sometimes though, as in today's gospel, stories of his ministry might need little unravelling if we are to know him better, if we are to know him as we know ourselves.

As Jesus foretells of his death and resurrection, his disciples are shaken. That is not only because they will lose Jesus, but because Jesus implies, they have to follow him to the cross. The thought that "I have to die to serve," troubled them, as it would deeply trouble all of us.

Now here is one of those occasions when the literal translation of the text just doesn't work. It may also be one of those reasons why more Peachlanders or neighbours don't come and visit us. How do we explain this to a seeker, "you have to sacrifice everything, perhaps even your life to be a part of our church?" I don't expect that would go over very well.

Mark's words, ³⁵ ***For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[c] will save it,*** ³⁶ **doesn't mean we march off to physical death.** That just doesn't make any sense. It means doing what is right in the world, risking our personal comfort, standing up for justice and behaving in every way as Jesus did. Perhaps more than anything, it means putting someone else first, rather than being self-serving. If you do as I do Jesus says, you will experience "The Holy" and know how God's love can bring light to the darkest places on earth.

Jesus speaks of losing an old life to a new one. Letting go of a tradition that was me orientated, dying to a new order.

When Jesus rebukes Peter with "**Get behind me, Satan!**" his meaning is, let go of your selfish and self-serving attitude. Your calling Peter is not about you and what you worry about, it is about doing justice and serving. "Do that and you follow me. Do that and you walk to the cross with me." "You need to let go of the past and adopt a new vision."

Mark's writing is about sacrifice, but not physical sacrifice. It is about living faithfully, caring for the broken, uplifting the underdog, being noticed, not shying away from controversy.

The same "adulterous and sinful world" Mark speaks about in Jesus' time exists now. Our living in faith means resisting the mistruths and negative energy trumped up to dissuade us. Somehow, I think Jesus knew that would happen. He understood mankind enough to know that there would always be the power seekers, the selfish and self-serving.

"Get behind me Satan" – get behind me selfishness, ego, corruption, influence, bribery, favoritisms.

There is a lot of talk these days about "Fake News." Sometimes it's difficult to determine what is fake and what is truth! But I can tell the difference between the two when it comes to Jesus. And so, my friends can you.

There are many mistruths, a lot of "fake news" about organized religion today, which is so very unfortunate. A lot of negative history, may I say, "bad theology," or inappropriate interpretation of scripture, plus the quest for power and authority, has given the church a bad name. It also causes a great deal of confusion for those that might be looking for a faith community.

I think our beliefs can be scrunched down very simply. First to say what we are not. We are not a place practicing active conversion of faith. We do not try and brainwash our members with promises that an omnipotent God makes. We don't practice that God is "in-control," selective, punitive or vengeful.

Who are we then? We are straight forward folks who practice kindness and generosity. We don't have huge egos that need to be stroked. We care about each other and our neighbours, and we do what we can to help them. We support this COF and do what we can do to help its ministry too, because we believe in the goodness it offers. While we are all really different on the outside, we try to be similar on the inside. We try to be like Jesus, Humble, Caring, Gentle and Loving

Jesus asked, "Who do people say that I am?" They suggested, "John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the Prophets." One even said the Messiah.

But that was not Jesus' mantra. Just a servant would be more like it. We know who he truly was, and we know who he truly is. We also know who we are and whose we are.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen