

September 16, 2018

Getting What You Ask For

Proverbs 1: 20-33

Mark 8:27-38

Who are you?

It is the title of several songs. One which I remember is by Peter Townshend of the band The Who. The story of the song goes that Townshend was in New York City in the early 1970s. He was concerned about his music and met up with a couple of guys from another band named. They partied. Townshend ended up passed out in the doorway of a building in the Soho district of the City where a police officer recognizes him and tells him that if he can get home by himself he won’t arrest him.

The lyrics are:

Who are you?

Who, who, who, who?

Who are you?

Who, who, who, who?

Who are you?

Who, who, who, who?

Who are you?

Who, who, who, who?

I woke up in a Soho doorway

A policeman knew my name

He said you can go sleep at home tonight

If you can get up and walk away

I staggered back to the underground

And the breeze blew back my hair

I remember throwin' punches around

And preachin' from my chair

Well, who are you? (who are you? who, who, who, who?)

I really wanna know (who are you? who, who, who, who?)

Tell me, who are you? (who are you? who, who, who, who?)

'Cause I really wanna know (who are you? who, who, who, who?)

Just who are you?

Jesus asked the disciples – who do people say I am? They answered John the Baptist, Elijah the prophet, maybe one of the other prophets.

If Jesus came here today and asked you who people would say he is, how would we answer? Today we might draw on scripture references or other cultural or religious titles: Son of God, Mary’s son, Light of the world, preacher, teacher, healer, Palestinian revolutionary.

But Jesus drilled down – who do you say I am? Peter drew down on something he had learned or known or guessed at – You are the Messiah!

Wow! That was a title to hope for the children of Israel. The Messiah was the one to provide stability after centuries of being mistreated and abused. The Messiah was a title that some took as a political leader, one to set things right in a world gone wrong.

Jesus tells Peter and the others not to share that at all. Instead Jesus begins a lecture on what will happen to the Son of Man, the Messiah. He will suffer greatly and be rejected by the people he came to save. He will die yet then rise again after 3 days.

This was a bit much for Peter – and it might be for any of us as well. No – Peter said to Jesus. You won’t suffer and be rejected and killed. You are the Messiah. That’s not what will happen.

Jesus responded - in the words of the MSG translation:

“Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”

What would we have done in Peter’s place? One moment he got the star for the right answer and the next he was reprimanded and told to go stand in the corner. What is going on?

The disciples wanted to know the answer to Jesus’ question. But I have to wonder if like us today in 2018 they went looking for the answer they wanted. Peter said – when pressed – that Jesus was the Messiah. I wonder if it was an explosion of a response that comes from that place Peter wasn’t even aware he had. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus affirms Peter.

*God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn’t get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am.*

But what that meant to Jesus and what that meant to Peter were different. Jesus says, there is more. It involves taking up a cross. To take up the cross is not to seek your own well being first. It is to find life in service for others. That can be a risky thing to do.

Yet Jesus affirms to have life, you must lose it. To have life you must be willing to be vulnerable and open self to others.

Lutheran pastor and writer Peter Marty puts it this way:

*Maybe you recall the first time you ever told someone (for whom you had strong feelings) that you really loved them. Your mouth got dry and your palms turned sweaty as you sought the courage to utter those words that are so powerful: "I love you." It's one thing to acknowledge that these three words are true. It's altogether something else to speak them and to realize how powerfully true they are. Because once they're spoken, you can no longer avoid the implications of them for your life.*

Oh my! What is it like to be vulnerable like that? Yeah I know. I hope you do as well.

So how would you answer Jesus today? Would you blurt out like Peter? Would you question like Peter? What answer are you looking for?

We live in relationships that are formed throughout our lives. Some of us learned a children’s hymn when we were small. Others of us have learned it as adults. *Jesus Loves Me* first appeared as a poem in a novel written in the 1860s where the words were spoken to a dying child. Since then it has been adapted and used by many Christians.

There is a story that Karl Barth, arguably the most significant Protestant theologian of the 20th century, when asked late in life to summarize his theology said it culd be summarized in the first couple of lines of the song, Jesus Loves Me. We will sing this today with some modifications.

Jesus loves me! This I know,

for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to him belong.

We are weak, but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!

Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves you! This I know,

as he loved so long ago,

taking children on his knee,

saying, "Let them come to me."

Yes, Jesus loves you! Yes, Jesus loves you!

Yes, Jesus loves you! The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves us! Loves us still

Even when we’re weak and ill

God’s commandment is to live

Loving all for God’s good will.

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves you!

Yes, Jesus loves us! The Bible tells me so.

As you do sing it today, think about how you would answer the question: Who is Jesus? Are you after the answer you want? Or are you open to follow Jesus in a different way?

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