

## Hayward United Methodist Church

Pastor Samuel's Message for the Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost, September 12, 2021

**“But Who Do You Say That I Am”**

**Text: Mark 8:27-38**

**Gospel Reading: Mark 8:27-30 (NRSV)**

And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah, and others one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he charged them to tell no one about him.

**Prayer for Illumination (UMH 6)**

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that, as the Scriptures are read and your word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

By this time Jesus and his disciples arrived in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus accomplished many things in his ministry. He taught many things in parables. He healed many who were sick. He preached in the Synagogue. He even went to the Gentile territory and healed some people. The disciples observed Jesus's ministry. Jesus taught the disciples in private. He explained to them some of the parables which they could not understand. The disciples had some understanding of who Jesus is. In Mark's Gospel, very often the disciples misunderstand Jesus. They still have a long way to learn about Jesus.

It is time for Jesus to examine the disciples. Soon Jesus would be going to Jerusalem where he would face the cross. He wanted the disciples to know how they understood his ministry. So far everything went well. Jesus was highly acclaimed as a great teacher and miracle worker. He got the whole crowd following him. Even the Gentiles admired his ministry. Jesus wanted to test the disciples as to who he was.

**First, Jesus asked the disciples what others think of him. This is the crucial time in Jesus's ministry. Although the crowd praised all he has been doing, he was sure of what was going on in people's mind. Probably the disciples heard about what others were saying about Jesus. So he asked them a very important question, "Who do men say that I am?" (Mk 8:27). Jesus wanted to know what the public thought of him. He wanted to get the public opinion.**

**The disciples were honest. They told Jesus what they heard of him. Jesus was John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus. He prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. He administered baptism for repentance. He was a great preacher. He gathered some disciples. In fact two of his former disciples became the disciples of Jesus. Jesus himself spoke very high of John the Baptist. He said, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). But John the Baptist was beheaded. Some people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist. Probably they did not know the whole story. They limited Jesus's identity. For them Jesus was more like John the Baptist. He was a preacher of the Kingdom of God. He was a great figure. But he was not the Son of God.**

**Some others thought that Jesus was Elijah. Who was Elijah? Elijah was a great prophet in the Old Testament. He performed many miracles. He helped many people. He challenged the false prophets. Elijah was taken away in a chariot to heaven. The Jews believed that Elijah would come and preside over the Passover meal. Jesus performed miracles. So people thought that Jesus came like Elijah. Even at the crucifixion, people thought that Elijah would come and take down Jesus from the cross. Elijah was called by God. But he did not accomplish salvation for his own people. After he was taken into heaven, we longer hear about him except in the gospel accounts.**

**Some thought that Jesus was one of the prophets. There were plenty of prophets in the time of the Old Testament. The prophets were the spokespersons for God. They called people to repentance. They called people to do justice and mercy. There were also false prophets. Jesus himself warned of the coming of the false prophets. Their ministry was short and they were not remembered after they were gone. The prophets did not die for others. The public has a different opinion of Jesus. They were comparing Jesus with the past figures. But they failed to**

comprehend who Jesus is. Despite of all what Jesus accomplished so far, people failed to grasp the true identity of Jesus. What's your opinion of Jesus? Is your opinion of Jesus dependent upon what others think of him. Jesus can be compared with the great figures in history.

Second, Jesus wanted to know what the disciples thought of him. Jesus asked a personal question. This is the question that everyone should answer for themselves. He asked, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 7:29a). Probably the disciples were taken back. They did not expect such a question from Jesus. This would be a time for test. Peter said, "You are the Messiah" (Mk 7:29b). Messiah means "King" or "anointed." Jesus was the promised King. Jesus's birth was predicted. He came to this world in fulfillment of prophecies. Jesus was God's sent to redeem the humanity. Even John the Baptist prepare the way of the Lord.

Peter spoke from his heart. He followed Jesus closely more than other disciples. He experienced Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus further explained his mission. Mark writes, "Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk 7:31). Although Peter did not know what lies behind his confession, Jesus made it clear. He came to suffer for the sins of the people. But he will be vindicated at his resurrection.

Peter not only spoke for himself but also he spoke for all other disciples including Judas who betrayed Jesus. The disciples had a different understanding of Jesus. They did not echo the public opinion. They experienced Jesus as the Messiah, not as John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. True identity of Jesus comes only through personal experience. One can not simply depend upon what others say of Jesus. Jesus would ask the same question. Who do you say that I am?

There is one thing to believe Jesus as the Messiah. There is another thing to experience Jesus as the Messiah. The crowd only believed Jesus as the prophet or the miracle worker. They did not stay enough to experience as the Savior. The crowd turned against Jesus at the very end. Because Jesus did not meet their expectation. The crowd wanted a political Messiah. The crowd failed to comprehend Jesus as the suffering Messiah. They did not have any personal relationship with Jesus to know him as the suffering servant.

**It all comes down to our personal experience. Everyone should find out who Jesus is through their experience. Theoretical knowledge of Jesus is important. One can gain such a knowledge by reading the Bible, especially the Gospels. Then one should spend time in prayer to claim Jesus for themselves. They should have a personal experience of Jesus as the Savior of the world.**

**Jesus brings peace and joy. Do you want to have peace and joy in your life? It is only through personal experience that one can find real peace and real joy in Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for all those who come to Jesus by faith. The Holy Spirit leads us to have a personal encounter with Jesus. Paul had a personal experience with Jesus on the way to Damascus. He did trust Jesus. Jesus forgave all his sins. He was baptized. He was commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles. His encounter with the risen Jesus changed his entire life.**

**Are you looking for change? Are you dependent on others for your faith? Are you set on what the world thinks of Jesus? This is the time to come to Jesus and experience him as the Messiah, as the Lord of your life. The author of 1 John 5:12-13 says, "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." The author of this epistle spoke from his experience. This is his personal testimony. He experienced Jesus as God's Son. He found eternal life in God's Son. What is your personal testimony?**

**God Bless.**

**Pastor Samuel**

**Let's say the Benediction together:  
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all. Amen.**