

“Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”
Mark 8:27-38
9/12/2021

Last weekend we celebrated a baptism
It was a day of celebration

When Emma was baptized,
We asked her parents and sponsors some questions.
One of them was,
*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
Put your whole trust in his grace,
And promise to serve him as your Lord,
In union with the church which Christ has opened
To people of all ages, nations, and races?*

What about you?

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

It's kind of like the question that Jesus is asking his disciples
In today's reading
²⁷ *Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea
Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that
I am?"*

²⁸ *They told him, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still
others one of the prophets."*

²⁹ *He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"*

– Mark 8:27-29

More important than what others say about Jesus,
More important than what the Church says about Jesus
More important than what your Sunday School teacher says about
Jesus
More important than what your neighbor says about Jesus
More important than what your co-worker says about Jesus
More important than what others say
is what **you** say about Jesus

Jesus asked his disciples,
"And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

For me, Jesus is my Savior and my Lord.

When this day was planned months ago
Our plan was to use this day at the beginning of the school year
To re-introduce me to the Pine Island community
And to all the people in our church who have not been able
To attend for more than a year.
A “do over” of sorts from 2020

COVID-19 would be under control and we as a church
Would be relaunching into our community

To understand who I am and what kind of pastor I am,
I need to tell you about why I am a Christian.
This is not a story of my call to ordained ministry,
But a story of my call to follow Jesus that came years before.

I grew up in the Hopkins United Methodist Church.

BTW, Hopkins United Methodist is no longer around
It is a congregation that is now closed
Despite being surrounded by millions of people.
And having more than 200 members
And hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bank
(But that's a story and sermon for another day
About the need fresh congregational leadership.)

I was brought to Sunday school.
As a youth I was recruited to sang in the youth choir, (and adult)
attended youth fellowship
and was confirmed.

When I was 15, even after I was confirmed,
I began to question
whether I should be Methodist or Catholic or Buddhist.

It seemed to me that most of the persons I knew back then
were their faith by default.
My friends believed, or belonged to the churches or synagogues
As a result of where their parents belonged.

My Roman Catholic friends were Catholic of because their parents
My Lutheran friends were Lutheran because their parents were.
My Jewish friends were Jewish because their parents were.

It appeared to me that this was terrible way to determine
What the ultimate truth and faith was
with so many options to choose from

And I am grateful for my parents
who were patient and accepting of my faith exploration.

And of course, some of us here know who God works.
The day after I made the decision
to start to explore other faith options,
Two Mormon missionaries rang our doorbell.

And once again, my parents were patient
as these missionaries tried to convert me
to the sect of the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

But you know how God works, huh?

Instead of being converted to the religion of Joseph Smith,
I encountered Jesus, the living Christ.

In my meetings with the Mormons, I was taught how to pray.
One day, as I was praying in our dining room,
I decided to break from the LDS script of words to use to pray
and offer my own prayer.
Kind of to ad lib like a jazz musician,
But with prayer

I talked to God and tried to make a bargain with God.
(Don't ever try to bargain with God,
because God always seems to win.)
Anyway, I tried to make a bargain.

*Lord, I have a deal for you. You know that I'm a pretty good person.
I don't drink.. I don't smoke. I don't do drugs. I hardly ever swear.
I'm nice to others.
I want you to look on all these good things.
So that when I do one or two things that I know are wrong
You can just look the other way.
Because, God, on the balance,
I do more good things than bad things.
How does that sound?*

And then the strangest thing happened.
It was as though Jesus answered me.

I heard Jesus say, without making a sound.
*I love you. No matter what, I love you. Even if you do things that
hurt me, I will still love you.*

Well, that was the divine insight that changed my life.
That message from Jesus changed my life.

I was loved.
I didn't have to earn God's love
Instead, it was a loving, free gift from God

Just like we talked about last week in church,
When we affirmed little Emma's baptism
All this is God's gift, offered to us without price

And all of a sudden, sinning lost some of its luster.
More importantly, having Jesus speak to me in such a plain way
Threw me for a loop.

First thing that I did was jump on my bike
And ride to my friend Eric's house
Eric was one of my buddies from Methodist Youth Fellowship
I remember running down to his basement,
Asking if anything like that had ever happened to him,
And then telling Eric what had just happened to me.

And I think it's safe to say that since that day, more or less,
I've been a Christian, a follower and a disciple of Jesus Christ.

As you can guess, my story continued from there in high school
Into college, where I accepted God's call to me
To serve Jesus in the ordained ministry
Changing the direction of my life from the track I was on
Of being a professional musician
To starting the journey to being a full-time pastor

How I was formed in my faith in graduate seminary
And formed in each of my previous congregational appointments

Many of you have heard of some of these things
And as time goes on, you will hear more
Of how I have come to be who I am today

But so that you can better understand more of who I am,
Here are three points from my early faith experience
Back when I was 15 years old.

Personal prayer is very important to me,
because that was how I first encountered Jesus
in a dramatic way.
Some people enter into faith through Bible Study
Others through hands-on mission work
Still others through fellowship and relationships
with someone who is a Christian.

But in my case, it was through prayer,
And that is my bedrock in keeping my faith vibrant
I don't spend those mornings on my knees in this Sanctuary
For you
I'm here on my knees for my personal relationship with Jesus

Evangelism and faith sharing is important to me,
Remember that the next thing I did that day was tell
my UMYF friend Eric Bartz what I had just experienced.

I love visiting and interacting with all sorts of people
And I love it even more when I can share something about
How having faith in Jesus can make a difference in our lives

Youth Ministry is important to me,
because if other youth don't get the chance
like I had to meet Jesus,
we run the very real risk of losing these persons forever.
And I mean forever.

This is why Northern Pines Church Camp
and mission trips
and Vacation Bible School
and Confirmation classes
are so important to me
These are some of the best places
to introduce young people to Jesus
(While having some fun at the same time)

A couple of us saw that happen Wednesday night
With a group of teenagers
Who happened to be hanging out in our parking lot

A final word about who I am as a pastor
and what I aspire to do on my best days
when all is going right

My inspiration is to be a pastor
who makes disciples of Jesus Christ
who then go out and change the world
As much as I love the work of ministry,
of visiting and praying,
and teaching,
and serving others,
I believe that the best thing that I can do is assist Jesus
Is to raise up more disciples who follow him
and set them loose on an unsuspecting world.
that needs Jesus now more than ever

With all the distractions and controversies and unknowns
That are swirling around us now
If we can remember that our mission as a church is
*To make disciples of Jesus Christ
For the transformation of the world*
I have confidence that we will find our way in the world
And we will be faithful in our mission
To serve in Jesus' name in our world

P.S.
A bit more about how I envision my personal calling as a pastor

We hear these words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians,
⁷ *God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift
that is given by Christ.*

¹¹ *He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and
some pastors and teachers. ¹² His purpose was to equip God's people
for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ ¹³ until we
all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal
is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by
the standard of the fullness of Christ.*

– Ephesians 4:7, 11-13 (CEB)

As a pastor, I believe that my job is to equip the saints,
to equip all of you, for the work of ministry.

Why?
Because all of us are called to ministry
through our baptism and our personal relationship with Jesus.

I want all of us moving from
Jesus just being our Savior
To Jesus being our Lord and Savior

(Hymn “There’s Something About That Name” # 171)