

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, June 19, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 9:18-24

"Who Do You Say That He Is?"

I think we have all run into people who say one thing but really mean another. I think there is a word for that – hypocrite. Because of that rumors can get started and can be pretty dangerous to someone's reputation and integrity. Our Lord Jesus is quite well aware of what others are saying, and professing to believe about Him. He knows what was being said then, just as He does today. And so, Jesus asks His disciples to share with Him what they are hearing that is being said about Him, and who do people say that He is. I have just got to ask - how did people come up with some of this stuff? Then, and now. The disciples tell Jesus that some people "*say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.*" If you think about it - these statements are not so far off from what some people are saying today about Jesus; some people say that "Jesus is a great teacher," or "oh, Jesus was a prophet, a preacher and a healer," or how about this one that really torques and upsets me - "Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven, but not the only way." Jesus asked His disciples this question so that they would hear the stark contrast between those statements and the absolute truth which Peter would proclaim when Jesus asked them specifically: "*Who do YOU say that I am?*"

Luke's Gospel gives us the short answer with Peter saying simply "*the Christ of God.*" Matthew, who was an eyewitness that day at Caesarea Philippi, recorded Peter as saying, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16) To those words, Jesus replied, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" (Matthew 16:17-18) Peter, would be a solid individual, a leader, whom Jesus would eventually rely on – but I am sorry, he is certainly not the foundation of the church, by any means! The statement of faith that Peter made when he announced Jesus to be the Messiah, the "*Christ, the son of the living God*" would be the "rock," the foundation of truth that would be the basis, and the foundation of the church – a faith that endures! Please do not let this be misunderstood. Saying "Jesus is a great teacher," or "Jesus was a prophet, a preacher and a healer," or "Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven, but not the only way" or even that someone else is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," poisons that foundation – weakening it to the point of collapse and rubble. I really must confess; it is unnerving and unsettling when those statements come from within the Christian community itself. It dilutes, and waters down the faith – it is absolutely deceitful and false! It is straight from the father of lies!

There comes a time when you get tired of hearing all of those lies, when the truth must be told – and the faith professed – no matter what! It is time to proclaim the true identity of the church. We as the Body of Christ can continue to ignore the poisons that are flowing through, or we can stand up, trusting in Almighty God for His provision, for His blessing, and for His strength in the days to come. Like Abraham, relying on our faith in Him that somehow we will make it through; somehow we will continue to proclaim the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ –

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as it has been handed down from the Apostles – and undiluted. As The Apostle Paul encourages the church in Ephesians 6:13, let us “*take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*” Let each one of us be confident that Jesus “*is the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” (Matthew 16:16) and let us, together, boldly, with blessed assurance, profess the faith that endures!

Let me ask you what you think. In the 17 years that I have been ordained – every year, when this Gospel reading comes up – I have asked these questions:

- Is Jesus the Son of God - that God the Father proclaimed on the mountain that day, on Mount Hermon during the Transfiguration - or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who required repentance of sin – and then provided forgiveness – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who sacrificed Himself on the hard wood of the cross – so that “*whoever believes in Him – shall not perish – but have eternal life?*” Or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who touched hearts and cured bodies and souls of people who have faith in Him and still does so today – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – or is He someone else who turns a blind eye at the Law that His Father gave to Moses?
- Is Jesus someone who believes every word that is in the Scriptures, as the written Word of God- or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who invites people to come to Him and be transformed – never to be the same again, healed of affliction, disease, addictions, perversions, and sinful behavior? Or is He someone else – who says come to me and stay just as you are! Have fun and forget what my Father said because that was for another time?

I find it heartbreaking that there are people *who “call themselves Christians”* today who cannot – or will not attest to the fact of Jesus’ true identity; that He is who God the Father says He is. They will either give you the list of things we have already gone over, or they might even say that He had great power that was used to lead us to our own divinity. I mean - really??? Our own divinity?? There are no gods in here that I know of and none of us as divine!

One thing is clear – you either accept Jesus Christ as the only Son of God – who died on the cross for the atonement of our sins – OR NOT! You believe in Him and what the Bible says about Him - OR NOT! If you do believe in Him, then you can call yourself a follower of Christ or a Christian; otherwise you are making up another religion all together – and you are following a different god! I suggest to you that these people need to end their charade and either submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ or not. The truth is: you either believe what the Bible says – or you don’t. It is as plain and simple as that. If you don’t believe what the Bible says – then start living whatever truth you do believe in and call yourself something other than a Christian! You need to know what is out there. The Apostle John warns us of this kind of deception with these words from 2 John 1:7-9 “*Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge*

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Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

We as followers of Jesus Christ, like Abraham, believe in God the Father; we also believe that God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world, so that *“whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) We also believe that God sent His Holy Spirit, who as Jesus told us in His words from John 14:26, *“the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”* If we believe that much, then we also should accept and profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, seeking a deeper, personal relationship with Him, through prayer and through spending time reading and listening to His Holy Word. That is why – guys – I gave you that book – and I pray that a year from now you will tell me how important it has been – and then you can start it all over again. I see we have a few extras in the back – so if you have someone at home, a son, or a friend – please take one and share. And yet, we still are fighting a battle with those who do not believe and question the truth, especially the Bible - as truth.

I often think of the words of Jesus from Matthew 7:24-27. I love to use these words during baptisms and weddings because they reflect the foundation that we need in order to exist. *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”* If the foundation is faulty, then so is its future. If our faith – our belief in Jesus Christ and the Words that He spoke to us, is solid, as if built on the rock – then our future is undeniable. But if we waffle or waver, unsure of what we believe or if we even believe at all, then we are like the foolish person who built on sand. An even worse situation is the person who begins with this solid foundation – but “sells out” to the world – “sells out” to the popular thinking of the masses: you know -- “you believe what you want and I’ll believe what I want.” “We’ll all be OK, because we are good people!” In my honest opinion – that kind of thinking is the poison that destroys. Faith is supposed to transform culture, but with a weak foundation the opposite happens – culture transforms the faith and Satan loves it that way! When the foundation weakens – it’s easy for the devil to seep into the sand that remains. It is like that bumper sticker that says “Co-exist.”

Today, as we worship and celebrate the Holy Eucharist, on this Father’s Day - let us thank God the Father, for the gift of His Son and His sacrifice, for the gift of His Word, and let our real identity reflect who we truly are, who we truly love, and what we truly believe. Only the Holy Spirit can help us to be who we say we are, and to show the world that we have Jesus in our hearts– reflecting the image of God the Father - through our love and belief in Jesus Christ.