

Friday, June 26, 2020

Who do you say that I am?

- Pastor Hank French

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-16).

This text gets up close and personal. Along with Jesus’ disciples, we are put on the spot, so to speak. Jesus asks a question of the disciples, a question that is also addressed to all of us.

Jesus was walking along the dusty roads of Galilee, preparing for his last journey to Jerusalem, when he stops and asks his disciples a simple question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

This is an easy question to answer; they just have to report what they have heard—which is what they do: “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” In other words, folks seem to see Jesus as one more in the great line of Hebrew prophets, perhaps even one of the great ancient prophets resurrected and returned to Israel to work the will of God in the present circumstances of Israel’s domination by Rome.

In fact, popular belief had it that Elijah, a great prophet who lived some 900 years before Jesus did, would return as a precursor to the coming of the Messiah. Perhaps, the common folk hoped, Jesus is Elijah returned, which means the Messiah should be right behind him! That was heady stuff!

But suddenly Jesus changes the question. Looking solemnly at his followers he asks: “But who do you say that I am?” Whoa! That is a hugely different and not so safe question. It has suddenly moved from the impersonal—What do others say? —to the personal—What do you say?

Peter blurts out, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” He is right, of course, but one wonders if, at that moment, he understood the implications of what he had just said. If he honestly believed that Jesus was the “son of the living God,” his life was going to change, his priorities were going to change, the meaning and purpose of his life were going to change—radically.

And ever since, Jesus’ question has been addressed to everyone—us included—who has claimed to be one of his followers: “But who do you say that I am?” It won’t do to just report what we hear from others, as the disciples first did. It won’t do to say things like: “The pastor says....” “The priest says....” “A book I read says....” “A Time Magazine cover story says....” “My wife, husband or friends say...,” etc.

The question we need to answer is the personal one: Who do we say that he is? If we answer, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God,” and we honestly believe that to be true, then our lives are going to change. That’s something I think about a lot. If Jesus truly is the son of the living God, then that’s something to take with the utmost seriousness.

Prayer: Jesus, I do believe you are the son of the living God. Teach me what that means for the way I do life. Amen.