

Gospel reflections

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Who do you say I am?

This week's gospel reading in Matthew has us engaging with this question. In Matthew's gospel, the identity of Jesus is a key concern. He begins the gospel with a complex, fascinating, structured genealogy and in Matthew 1:23 we learn that Jesus shall be called Immanuel, 'God with us'. The stories that precede this week's reading focus heavily on the question of; *Who is Jesus?* Jesus teaches and is rejected in Nazareth; John the Baptist is killed; Jesus feeds the five thousand; Jesus walks on water; the encounter with the Canaanite woman and another four thousand are fed. You can almost feel the tension building with the swirling questions of Jesus' identity. Chapter 16 begins with the Pharisees and Sadducees asking Jesus for a sign to prove his identity. Jesus and his disciples have moved to Caesarea Philippi and Jesus poses this question. We can imagine that by now the crowds were flocking to Jesus. They have heard of his lifechanging healing and preaching. It could very well be that Jesus was wondering or even concerned about what the crowds were saying. Jesus draws close to his disciples and asks them how they are feeling and thinking about him.

Peter, of course it is Peter, makes the genuine confession, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Peter identifies Jesus, connecting the names of Messiah and Son of the living God. The living God that is a dynamic God, engaged in the here and now and not a static God whose clearest communication happened a long time ago. Jesus encourages and affirms Peter and provides a glimpse of his plan for his disciples. They will be the beginning of a new community that will go on and make disciples of all nations (28:18-20).

Jesus asks each of us to wrestle with this question and not just theologically but also personally. How we identify Jesus will impact the way we interact with one another and the world. Who we say Jesus is also shapes our own identity, who we are as sons and daughters of the living God. Our response is not just a name but an expression of a relationship that impacts our way of being.

Just as we need to reflect on this question personally, we also need to create time to discuss it communally. *The LCA and its schools and Growing deep* state that in Lutheran education *the gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities*. Jesus shapes who we are and what we do daily. Jesus sets us free to explore and inquire into the wonders of life with students. Our communities continue to be innovative and strong in Lutheran identity when we regularly revisit, discuss and debate questions like this:

- What does gospel of Jesus Christ mean for the interactions I will have today, including the tough conversations?
- How does the gospel of Jesus provide freedom and inform the breadth of content and pedagogy for year 12 chemistry, physics or biology teachers?
- How does it shape the care for families and play experiences in our early childhood context?
- What does it look like, sound like and feel like on challenging days when the pain of an individual or the community is overwhelming?

The *Connect* ePortfolios provide evidence of how valuable it is to have these conversations and share the many ways that Lutheran education communities are living out their response to Jesus' question.

Prayer (based on Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20, Psalm 124)

Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth, we gather together in Your name.

We come as living sacrifices, to offer You our worship and thanksgiving, our praise and our prayers.

Come among us, living Lord.

Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, transform our hearts and minds so that we may recognise Your presence, hear Your voice, know Your will, and walk in Your way.

*We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Saviour. Amen*

Insights from others

Here's my point. Who we say Jesus is has everything to do with who and how we are and will be. In some ways our answer says as much or more about us than Jesus. It reveals how we live and what we stand up for. It guides our decisions, and determines the actions we take and the words we speak. It describes the expectations and demands we place on Jesus. It discloses the depth of our motivation for and commitment to following him, a motivation and commitment that will be challenged by next week's gospel in which Jesus invites us to take up our cross and die with him.

Jesus' question isn't so much about getting the right answer as it is about witnessing and testifying to God's life, love, and presence in our lives and the world. It is less about our intellect and more about our heart. It is grounded in love more than understanding. It moves us from simply knowing about Jesus to knowing him. ...

There is nothing safe about the question Jesus poses. How could there be? There is nothing safe about Jesus or the life to which he calls us.

Jesus' life and presence among us calls into question everything about our lives, our world, the status quo, and business as usual. That's why we ought not answer his question too quickly, too glibly, or with too much certainty. It's not a question to be figured out as much as it is a question to be lived.

[\(Interrupting the silence\)](#)

The questions remain. What would it look like for us to claim such a blessing and to have such imagination as to join in this confession and community -- as Peter speaks on our behalf? What if we were to see ourselves, too, as called and blessed in our encounter with God's Messiah? What if we were to then know ourselves to be called by this promise and given a new identity as disciples and ambassadors of the kingdom? And what if we could then catch even a glimpse of what it means to be part of this new community authorized and empowered as agents to exercise the task of forgiving and welcoming in the name of a God who desires "mercy and not sacrifice" (9:13; 12:6)? And what if our hope should be constantly to be part of that vision that to the ends of the earth the will of God might indeed be realized -- that not one of these little ones should be lost to the saving love of God (1:21; 18:14)? [James Boyce](#)

Finally, Jesus commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he is the *Christos* (Messiah or anointed one) of the living God. Well then, how shall they build an *ekklesia* on the truth of his identity, one that even the gates of Hades will not overpower? Their lives will speak louder, more truthfully, and more effectively than their words. The answer is by the life they live, a life of love for God, a life that loves the other as much as one loves herself, and a life in pursuit of justice and peace.... On this rock, let us build assemblies that demonstrate belief in a living, speaking, incarnating God, a God of freedom and not of oppression, a God of justice, love, and peace. [Mitzi Smith](#)

Jesus is the revelation of God's unending, unconditional love for us human beings. Everything that Jesus has done, said, and undergone is meant to show us that the love we most long for is given to us by God, not because we deserved it, but because God is a God of love. Henri Nouwen

Songs

[You've always been](#) Unspoken

[How great is our God](#), our God, How great thou art Caleb and Kelsey

[More](#) Red rocks worship

