

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 1:20-33

1:20 Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

1:21 At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

1:22 "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

1:23 Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.

1:24 Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,

1:25 and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

1:26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,

1:27 when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

1:28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.

1:29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

1:30 would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,

1:31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.

1:32 For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them;

1:33 but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."

Psalm 19

19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

19:4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

19:5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its

course with joy.

19:6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;

19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

19:9 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

19:11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

19:12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

19:13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

James 3:1-12

3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

3:2 For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle.

3:3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

3:4 Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

3:5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!

3:6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.

3:7 For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species,

3:8 but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

3:9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

3:11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?

3:12 Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 8:27-38

8:27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

8:28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

8:29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

8:30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

8:31 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.

8:32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

8:33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

8:34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

8:35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

8:36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

8:37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

8:38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, we worship and adore you - source of all wisdom, praying that today our understanding of your holy wisdom may be deepened. May such wisdom flow into our lives so that we begin to see the world and everything in it through your eyes; so that we know what it is to be shaped by Jesus' wisdom: when the last will be first; where the meek rather than the mighty will inherit the earth; where those who lose their lives for the sake of Jesus will find them and taking up our cross to follow him will be the wisest thing we ever do. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

As a continuation of the prayer, invite people to sing softly, while seated, TIS 342/AHB 258 "When I survey the wondrous cross" - standing to sing -with full voices - the final verse.

SUGGESTION FOR CHILDREN'S TALK : Ask the children/young folk if they know what 'wisdom' means or what 'being wise' means. The Macquarie Dictionary definitions include: "... knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; ...common sense." Explain that the scripture readings today are concerned with "wisdom" - perhaps you could compare our human 'common sense' to God's 'uncommon sense'. We sang the previous hymn as an example of 'uncommon sense'. Jesus was prepared to die on the cross to show us how much he loves us and he calls us to follow him - to love one another with that kind of love. Many people would think that that is certainly 'uncommon sense', but that is what we sang about in the last verse of the hymn - "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all" We get another picture of what it means to be wise from the Letter of James - he is saying that we have to use our words wisely. He compares how quickly and easily we can use our tongues to say unwise and hurtful things to the speed in which a bush fire can start if someone is careless with even a little spark. Now, in spring, many fire officers are taking precautions for the summer, by burning off undergrowth in areas which could be dangerous when the hot weather comes. They are being very wise. Jesus wants us to be wise also - wise in his ways - being loving and gentle, caring for others - when we live like that we are exercising not only our own 'common sense', but God's 'uncommon sense'.

ALL TOGETHER OK 325: "Sing to God with joy"

TIS 465/AHB 399: "Father in heaven, grant to your children"

TIS 162/AHB 114: "Thank you for giving me the morning" In AHB 114 verse 2 make the hymn more inclusive by inviting half the congregation to sing 'sisters' instead of 'brothers'

GOSPEL: Mark 8:27-38

PRAYER OF CONFESSION -

Lord Jesus Christ, you exercised 'uncommon sense' when you turned conventional wisdom on its head with your call for your followers to deny themselves; to lose their lives for your sake and to embark on a narrow path leading towards life centred in you and your love.

Forgive us when, like Peter, we identify your power with prestige rather than servanthood, and falter in our understanding of what following you really means.

Pause for reflection on these words

Forgive us for failing to trust your holy wisdom Lord, because we fear making mistakes, and our decisions become influenced by our human weakness rather than your spiritual strength.

Forgive us when our common sense calls us to prefer the comfort of the familiar here and now, rather than responding to your call to follow you into the unknown and risky journey of discipleship.

Pause for reflection on these words

Lord Jesus Christ, give us the grace to listen and to trust in the midst of the unknowing nature of your call to each of us and the unknown direction which you call us to travel. You have travelled the road already so what have we to fear? We do want to be your followers so that we can reveal through our lives, as you did, the shape of God's holy wisdom and unconditional love. Renew us with the power of your Spirit so that we can commit ourselves anew to the challenge of serving others in your name and for your sake. Amen

Scripture in Song 17 "Its a new and living way, walk ye in it"

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

All of us do make mistakes (James 3:2) but we are fortunate that God sent Jesus into the world to save sinners - people like us. And so I declare to you, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God!**

WHO IS Jesus for you?

Peter's on the hot seat this morning... and not for the first time. Peter's on the hot seat because he has a question to answer and the answer can only come from the experience of the past couple of years he has lived with Jesus Christ as his Master and teacher.

Wisdom in Proverbs cries out in the streets at such a question posed by Jesus and seeks an answer to help us live the everyday. James would remind us how difficult it is for a teacher to present a truth which makes sense and even the teacher is prone to mistakes.

So what can Peter say that will make sense to himself and to any who are asked such a question? Let's leave Peter for a few moments on the hot seat to ponder the question... and let's turn the tables by asking you the exact same question. If I dared, I'd now have you turn toward one another and offer your response to Jesus' question – “who do you say that I am?” I did that Wednesday with our lectionary group and an amazing conversation resulted.

It's the crucial question for Christians – no other even comes close... it defines us as Christians in a way no other question can. Let me express it this way using some of Marcus Borg's words: “Jews find the decisive revelation of God in a book—in the Jewish Bible, especially the Torah (the first five books of the Bible, also known as the books of Moses, the Law, and the Pentateuch) and commentaries on it (the Mishnah and Talmud). So also Muslims find the decisive revelation of God in a book, the Quran. But Christians find the decisive revelation of God not in a book, but in a person:”... and his name is Jesus

There was a time I could simply look at Jesus through a certain lens and that was sufficient... such as the lens given to me by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about

His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity)

I can't always use the same way to express myself as others have whom I follow in the faith. But I am completely in step with them when they say that it really is all about who Jesus is for us and how we experience Jesus in our everyday life. I find it ironic this morning that I can quote Marcus Borg to support what C.S. Lewis said a generation before. Borg challenges every one of us when he declares: "For me as a Christian, Jesus is *the decisive revelation of God*. This is Christianity's most central claim and it goes back to its beginnings. In language from the New Testament, Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), "the Word of God" incarnate (John 1:1–14), "the Light of the World" (John 9:5), God's revelation to Jews and Gentiles alike (Luke 2:32–33). Jesus *reveals, discloses, embodies* what can be seen of God in a human life. (Conversations with Scripture: Mark, by M. J. Borg).

"Who do you say that I am?" Marcus Borg, in his book Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time, says there are basically two widespread images of who Jesus is which are held by a majority of people

The first of these images is Jesus as the "divine saviour." This view of Jesus is probably summed up best in the words of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." It is a faith or belief-based view of who Jesus is and the hope of this view is that our faith will motivate us to act on our beliefs.

The second of these images is Jesus as a "teacher." This image is held by those who are not sure what to make of the doctrinal claims made about Jesus by the Christian tradition. When these are set aside, what remains is Jesus as a great teacher. His moral teachings may be understood in quite general terms, such as the Great Commandment and the Gold Rule, or in quite specific terms as a fairly narrow code of righteousness. But in either case, the kind of Christian life that flows out of this image of Jesus consists of "being good" and seeking to live as Jesus said we should.

Borg says that both of these images are inadequate. He suggests that "life is not about believing or about being good, rather, it is about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation." In other words, our understanding of who Jesus is rooted primarily in our experience of the living Christ, who is moving in our lives and changing us day by day. It is a view of

Jesus that can have elements of belief and doing good but is relationship-centered first and foremost.

So much of our faith is contained by responses to Jesus' first question, "Who do people say that I am?" While our answers may vary, they are often along the line of "Well Marcus Borg says this -- and N.T. Wright says that; but the consensus of scholars seems to me to say ..." We get lost in the words that have been spoken about Jesus. Other religious expressions view Jesus in certain ways, the secular world sees Jesus in radically different ways and so, too, do Christians... and none of this is surprising.

So Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" and the ground shifts. It is no longer sufficient to quote Borg or Crossan, Barclay or Spong. The Christ stands before us and asks us to respond from what is deepest and most sacred and most hidden within us.

How do we begin to answer? Maybe back to Sunday School and a catechism, a bible verse, a hymn that expresses who Jesus is. Any answer has to be based on the experiential – how have you experienced Jesus Christ in your life? Tough question if you're not used to such expression. How have I experienced Jesus over the decades I have been ordained? And maybe just as important, how have I experienced Jesus in those most formative days when, as a young boy, I was becoming aware of the world around me. How does Jesus fit in to that world of awareness and maturation and personal development? How has my experience of Jesus changed me on the inside? Or has it made any discernable difference at all? Again this is all part of living the faith in the everyday.

So, again, how do we begin? One place for us to begin is by finding ourselves in the people who confront or are confronted by Jesus in the gospels.

As I hear Jesus calling Peter and James and John and Andrew and the rest to follow him, how am I challenged to follow Jesus right here, right now. It is the same challenge they faced so what do I learn from them? Or how about those who encounter Jesus for but a moment – like that Syro-Phoenician woman last week who wanted her child freed from a demon, or that Samaritan woman who debated with Jesus at the well or the centurion who showed such remarkable faith – what kind of encounters have I had in my life that help me understand who Jesus is for me in my everyday living. The context of those who come is crucial – just as my context is crucial in my coming to the Christ in my everyday living. As people come to Jesus with their sin and their sickness and their suffering and their sorrow and their questions and their concerns and

their worries and their woes and their trials and their tribulations (you get the idea) – the real crucial question, at least for me is, ‘how much of my life is exposed in these stories and how much of my experience resonates with theirs and therefore how much of my understanding of Jesus is shaped by all that I encounter in scripture?’ OK, that’s pretty deep but maybe just as deep is the more immediate experience that now has me ask, ‘how much of my experience of Jesus has been shaped by you, by you and your story of who Jesus is and by other Christians who have been part of this church of Jesus Christ with me over the last half century. You see much of what I’ve experienced of Jesus Christ is what I’ve experience of Jesus Christ living in you. Scary thought isn’t it.

May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus is asking you this question, inviting you into a deep and lasting relationship with him. How do you respond? And how does that answer inform your daily life?

The other side of the question, "Who do you say that I am?" becomes clearer as we relive the same stories not as bystanders, but as Jesus, responding to the hurts and the hopes, the fears and the confusion of those standing in front of him. We are invited to encounter them through the eyes of the Christ -- and it is in that encounter that we learn (and then live) the heart of the mystery. Who is it who speaks to the woman at the well, to the demoniac in chains, to the crowd as he embraces the child? Who is it that says to people and therefore to me ‘your sins are forgive’, or ‘come and follow me’ or a host of other such declaration that require a response. Who is he and what right does this Jesus have to demand anything of me in my life separated from his by two thousand years of history, much of that history filled with bloodshed and violence in his name committed by those who claim to be following his way?

I can’t end until I tell you a truth that would make Wisdom smile in the book of Proverbs. The truth is that this question must be seen as part as an ongoing conversation – one that starts with Peter and Jesus on the other side of the crucifixion but one that continued for Peter on this side of the resurrection... is a question whose answer changes as your experience of Jesus in your everyday life changes. It is a dynamic question and demands a dynamic answer. The moment you codify it you already begin to lose it... “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” And almost immediate the gospel of Matthew begins the interpretation of what that means, so in Matthew we hear, “You are the Christ,

the son of the living God.” The Psalmist said “There is no speech, nor are there words.” And often that relationship we have with Jesus can no longer be defined by speech or lofty words but is real and powerful nonetheless. “...it is about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation.”

My plea to you is to continue the conversation, to daily ask who Jesus is for you today, to ask how Jesus will change how you live today and tomorrow, to continually be in conversation with him as you ask who he is, and maybe, just maybe, as you listen, you will find a little more of who you are

Go in peace,
and May the Christ who walks on wounded feet
walk with you on the road,
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands,
stretch out your hands to serve.
May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart
open your hearts to love
May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet
and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you
This both now and forevermore.

If you'd like a deeper reflection on Borg's understand of who Jesus is, please go to
http://www.explorefaith.org/faith/explore_the_bible/shortcut_of_the_gospel_of_mark.php

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