

The Unexpected, Expect It

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Year A: Matthew 16:13-20 ¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

It makes a difference who we confess Jesus to be! He is the Son of God our savior and redeemer. It might be challenging for us to proclaim it, but in these days of anxiety, there is nothing else more important. Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one, God's Son.

No one would have expected it there. No one would have expected Peter to declare the living God among them in the person of Jesus at that site. Jesus had taken the disciples to Caesarea Philippi. In years gone by, it was a site of a Baal cultic center, then a place of worship to the Greek god Pan. Finally Herod the Great had a huge temple built to worship Caesar Augustus. During the Jewish war of 66-70, some Jewish captives had been thrown to wild animals. This was a place where Rome celebrated victory over Jews and a site of pagan worship.

No one would have expected a divine revelation and confession of faith to happen here in Caesarea. But for the readers of Matthew's Gospel, a Jewish audience, the revelation in this spot was specific. It was crucial, even imperative for Matthew's readers.

Remember from last week, we talked about how the Canaanite woman saw Jesus' identity clearly when the disciples were just beginning to understand? Now, Jesus poses the question directly to them.

“Who do people say I am?” In the ancient world, that was the only question. In a system of honor and shame, one's identity came from what others thought of you. If they honored you, thought well of your family, or if you brought your family

shame. The community was the consciousness of identity. It wasn't an individual process of self-reflection in isolation. (Malina and Rorhbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. Pg 113*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8jUA7JBkF4>)

Think of the prodigal son. He dishonored his father and family by taking the inheritance and running away. This is why the story has such power, for the father welcomed him home.

There was no 21st century introspection and psychological thought: "Who am I? Who do I want to be?" The only question was how one was perceived by others. Hence Jesus' question, "Who do people say I am?"

The disciples' answers are all about prophets. "Word on the street is you're Elijah or Jeremiah!" Folks aren't talking about little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. They aren't speaking about comforting Jesus who heals all wounds. Their answers are about hair-raising, wild-eyed, rebellious prophets speaking against power and for truth.

But then Jesus turns to all of them again, with his eyes surveying His little band of disciples.... "But who do you all say I am?"

Isn't that the question for us today? Who do we all say Jesus is? The answer is easy right here, when we're in worship. Jesus is God! Remember the pastor who reminded the kids. "If you don't know an answer during a children's sermon, just say, Jesus!" Yes! Here it is easy for us to confess! Jesus is Savior! Jesus is Messiah! Jesus is divine and human! Jesus is Love!

Yet when we get up in the morning, when we eat our meals, when we watch the news, when we attend a party with our non-church going friends, when we're on Colfax Ave in Denver with women who make their living as prostitutes or here on Garfield in front of the downtown Safeway with our homeless population....who do we say Jesus is?

Many of us are retired, but can you remember a day when a buddy or your girlfriends said, "Let's go out on the town!" and you knew it wasn't going to be a simple beer that night? Or closer to home, how about the Shambhala Mountain Center and the Great Stupa in Red Feather? Or even just on the golf course? How do we confess Jesus in those places? When a contractor comes to our homes? What then?

Jesus asks, “Who do you all say I am?” Peter confesses first!

“You are Messiah, Son of the living God!” He says, “You, Jesus are the anointed one, come to save our people. You are the king appointed by God for us.”

In the shadow of a place that worships Ceasar, where Rome had destroyed Jerusalem, Jesus is proclaimed the Messiah. No one would have expected it.

And does anyone even expect it from we Christians today? Do people expect us to talk about faith? What is King of Glory Lutheran known for? Who would people say we are?

Of course they know us for our incredible Christmas Bazaars and our Glory Garden on the corner of 29th and Wilson. They might know we are a church who welcomes all people: gay and straight, single or divorced, young and old, members and friends. But what do they know of our witness about God?

Would anyone expect us to say, Jesus is our Messiah, our Savior, God’s only Son, in a one on one conversation? Likely not...it’s language we Lutherans are not very comfortable using – at least out loud. We’re more comfortable talking about being saved by grace or God’s forgiveness. But if no one would expect us to...if no one expects us to talk about our faith...what does that say...about us and God whom we believe in?

These are anxious days. We Lutheran Christians have incredible faith to share! Our theology is spot on for just these kinds of times. We are saved by grace through faith! We are sinners and saints because of Jesus. We know who we are and whose we are! Together we proclaim God’s unconditional love for the sake of the world! We live life in paradox as God’s both/and people in an either/ or world.

What if you and I, make people begin to expect that from us. We members of King of Glory are known to say....

“We believe in God who is always with us even now.”

“We believe in God who turns death into resurrection. We are Easter people.”

“We believe Jesus is at the bedside of every Covid patient, because whether we live or we die, we are God’s.”

“We believe that within the destruction of fires which consume creation, there will be new life.”

“We believe in the dignity of all people, because all people are made in God’s image.”

“We believe you are welcome and invited to come worship here.”

What if we made people expect our confession, our profession of faith and our invitation to worship? In the end, is there anything of more importance? People are dying all around us. Our own members who are medical personnel are getting weary. Our teachers are scared and they haven’t even begun yet.

Will you make that unexpected call this week? The list of our medical staff and teachers are on the prayer chain. Write them a note of encouragement. Call and say to them, “God is with you!” Send an email to Brad Abbott whose staff is worried sick about the fire near Sky Ranch. Call Pastor Paul Judson and ask how we can support our Lutheran college students at CSU. If you don’t know what to say, start with, “We, King of Glory, believe in you. God is with you.”

If we start right here, I promise it gets easier to speak like this beyond 2919 N. Wilson. At the end of the day, is there truly anything else more important? No! People are dying to hear some Good News and we have it in Jesus Christ.

So for ...God’s sake, let’s do the unexpected, let us confess like Peter did. Let us confess and confess and confess in every time, in every place, until it becomes normal and people expect it of us.

Jesus is the Messiah. The Anointed One, God’s only Son. To Him be all our praise, now and forever. Amen.