

Peter's Confession of Christ: "You Are"

Luke 9:18-27

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ July 1, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

18 Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" **19** They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." **20** He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."

21 He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, **22** saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

23 Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. **24** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. **25** What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? **26** Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. **27** But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

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During Vacation Bible School this past week, there was an alternate personality running around that some said looked a lot like me. I couldn't argue with that. Most had this figured out pretty early on, but late in the week, one little boy came up to this "other" personality named Zip and said, "You know, some people think you and that other guy are actually the same. But I believe in you, Zip!"

If there is one thing I've found to be true, kids know how to make declarations. Kids know how to be absolutely sure about what they believe, and speak it boldly. One of my favorite children's letters to God goes like this:

Dear God, I know that you are made of all kinds of people. When I suggested this in religious school my teacher told me I

was wrong – you should be more careful about who you hire to teach your stuff. Yours truly yours, Marci (age 11)'

In our Scripture passage today, we come to a pause in the action, a turning point in the form of a really important conversation. Once in a great while, we are all faced with decisions that force us to look back at recent events, look ahead at what is coming and make a decision about how we are to proceed. This is one of those moments for the disciples. You might call it the half-time locker-room talk, a break in the action, where the coach asks his team a defining question:

"Do you want to be winners or losers after the next 30 minutes on the game clock? Do you have what it takes? Are you going to rise up and stand victorious?"

Or it might be:

"What do you think people are saying about who we are after the first half? What would *YOU* say about who we are as a team?"

And how the coach responded would depend on how they answered that question.

One thing I want to notice about this moment, this conversation, with the disciples, is how it is bookended with prayer. Jesus prays a lot throughout the gospels, spends time with his Father, but this is the only chapter in all four gospels that twice records Jesus pulling away from the action to pray. Fresh off the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is praying alone with his disciples nearby. The people had eaten. They'd gone home. They were taking a deep breath; it was the calm after the storm... *like 12:30 in the afternoon around here every day during Vacation Bible School.*

Then, if we were to continue to read where we left off, we read that Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him up a mountain to pray.² I have to think as organized as Dr. Luke is, that he intentionally placed these times of solitude, these soul-moments around our

¹ Heller, David. *More Children's Letters to God*. 1991. Pg 155.

² Luke 9:28

conversation today to get a sense of prayerfulness and weightiness.

I don't know if it would be stretching it too far to say that when we go before God in prayer, the first and most important question we ask ourselves and then declare in gratitude is "Who is Jesus?"

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, how does he begin? "Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed or holy*, is your name." In that moment, before you get to your own list of things we want or even things we are thankful for, we are answering Jesus' question: "Who do *you* say that I am?"

There is an interesting parallel with the story we just looked at last week, the feeding of the 5,000. First there is a something acknowledged generally for the crowd (a need for food in this case). It is a big-picture problem to be solved. But as Jim pointed out, Jesus makes it personal in a somewhat frightening direction to the disciples when he says: "You give them something to eat." And it reads with even more emphasis than that, "You *yourselves* give them something to eat." The disciples were being prepared and trained to do the work of Christ.

Now we come to this first question, again it is general as they look around them: What are the crowds saying about me? I just fed 5,000 people...I've healed hundreds...I've cast out demons...I've spent a lot of time teaching small groups and large groups...I've eaten with the wrong kind of people...I've thrown out a few one-liners that aren't exactly popular...*so how are my ratings and who do people say that I am?*

They give some short answers, expected answers. A few big names are thrown around. Some people are making claims about who he is that seems plausible about old or new prophets. It seems the disciples are trying to make it clear to Jesus that there is a lot of confusion *out there*. The people in the crowd are in full agreement that their bellies are full, but they are not in agreement about who this man is supposed to be.

If Jesus were to give them a chance to keep talking, they might say, "Jesus, It's time to make it fully known, without a doubt, who you are!"

But Isn't that how we're wired? We just want the world to know what we know. We don't want to have to keep explaining ourselves.

But at the same time, we're a little afraid to answer the next question that Jesus asks: "What about *you*? Who do *you yourselves* say that I am?"

Don't worry about the others right now. What about you?

And it's a question that causes all of the disciples to pause for a moment...everyone that is, except Peter. Peter never hesitates. Peter jumps right in:

You are the Messiah of God.

I imagine there are crickets for a moment. The rest of the disciples holding their breath to see what Jesus will say. Then the faintest trace of a smile across Jesus' lips, before he says what?

DON'T.

TELL.

ANYONE.

WHAT!?

Now, at this point, it would be good to remember that sometimes we have to look at the other gospels. Perhaps Luke is tired of Peter getting so much attention, but he leaves out a major turning point in Peter's life here. In Matthew's gospel, after Peter's confession, Jesus says, "Blessed are you son of Jonah! You are Peter (which is an adjective that literally means...*Rocky*). He says, on this foundation, I will build my church."³

Way to go Peter! Well done!

As a result of Matthew's version, different Christian traditions give Peter more or less credit, some even tracing direct lineage of church leadership right back to him. But even Jesus, in the middle of this applause, makes one thing clear. "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

Peter's rockiness, his excellent statement, comes *only* from God. The foundation of the church will be the rockiness of all of us: our ability to confess: "Jesus is the Messiah."-- the one that was promised, the creator of all things, the answer to every question under heaven and in heaven. The Alpha, and the Omega. The Great I Am.

What about YOU? Who do YOU say that I am? The answer to this question is the solid foundation for the builder of the house. It is the rockiness of our faith.

You could spend a lifetime tracing the theme of rocks and stones throughout Scripture, but I think the theme of rocks is really helpful in remembering some things this passage can teach. Here's the three things we can

³ Matthew 16:17

learn, and then I'll tell you how the theme of rocks can "solidify" it for us:

What we say matters.

Where we say it matters more.

What God is already saying matters the *most*.

Four Faith kids, four MVP kids, and three of us leaders are fresh off a backpacking trip in the Sierras, where, as you know, there are a lot of rocks. When you spend any time there, you realize that rocks can be your best friends or your worst enemies.

Rocks can bring hope,
and rocks can bring pain.
If the rocks could speak, what would they say?

When Jesus returned to Jerusalem, Jesus was ordered by the Pharisees to tell his followers to stop shouting praises to God. And he said, "If these people were silent, the rocks *themselves* would cry out." (There's that same emphasis again.) It was no accident that Jesus took this pivotal moment, surrounded by prayer, and asked this question.

What we say *matters*. We were designed by the creator to put words to our lives and boldly declare who God is to the world. If we don't the rocks will do it. This is how God created it, pulsing with his fingerprints, wanting to be known, and calling for us to join the chorus.

As I said, Rocks can bring hope. This is a cairn (spell it). It serves as a marker in areas that are too rocky to build a trail, a symbol that you're on the right trail. When it's been awhile since you've seen a cairn, you might start to get a little bit worried, and the rocks start to not feel so hopeful anymore.

Incidentally, what would the rocks sounds like? Three guys in a percussion group went to a park called "Ringing Rocks Park" in Pennsylvania, and recorded themselves with hammers on certain spots on the rocks. It ended sounding like this: ⁴

There is no sweeter sound to God, and I would say to all of creation when we seize opportunities to interrupt our small talk and proclaim that JESUS IS LORD, CHRIST IS MESSIAH! We need to talk "God", point to Jesus, with each other wherever we go.

On this particular trip that we recently took, we had to split up for a moment, and most of the group headed back down a trail we had come up the day before. When we got to our expected meeting spot, the rest of the group was nowhere to be found. After a bit of searching and getting to a high spot for phone service, I got a text: "We very lost." I do want to assure you that the situation was not as desperate as I'm going to make this sound, but it felt like it. We pieced together what must have happened, and one of the clues was, we're on top of a big granite slab. At that point I looked out and all I could see were big granite slabs down the entire valley. At that point, the rocks were no longer signs of hope.

This is a crucial point that we can't miss in this story: *Where* we say it matters even more. To be able to say that Christ is the Messiah, the Promise, the sign of Hope while you're happily marching along the trail is one thing, but to say it when you are thirty, hungry, tired, hot, and *lost* is quite another.

I met a woman across the street in front of St. Anthony's. She told me she's a member there. For the last few days, she's been singing praise songs quite loudly right there on the street. It turns out, her cat ran away from her right there at that point. She was obviously sad at her loss, but her choice was to sing praises to God in hopes that her cat would find its way back. Even at the location of her loss, she is proclaiming God's promises.

As quickly as Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus makes it clear what that means. Come on disciples, go back and study your Book of Isaiah. Do you know what it means that I'm the Messiah? I will suffer at the hands of the authorities in cruel ways, I will be rejected by the world – even you all – and I will be killed in the worst way imaginable. So you if you want to follow me, you need to be prepared for that as well. My followers are going to know this kind of suffering.

We will all know suffering. Some are fully in the midst of it right now. And in those moments, so many of you have been examples to me of the ability to keep singing God's praises. We sound great on Sunday mornings. How do we sound in other places in our lives? I spent a few minutes this week working on my sermon in a hospital lobby. I have to say, I need to do that more often. The needs of people that pass by, the kind of desperation and fear and heartache, and also real faith, that was evident in the faces made the message feel tangible.

⁴ Square Peg Round Hole percussion group.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5cJbcoWaH8>

Perhaps we need to spend more time with people in hospitals, and homeless shelters, and border control offices, and prisons. It was Paul who wrote, even from his own prison cell: “Rejoice in the Lord...*ALWAYS*. And in case you didn’t get it I will say it again...*REJOICE!*” Let your gentleness be evident to all.⁵

Where will we speak the message of Christ to the world? In what darkness and suffering in our own lives will we continue to rejoice?

Finally, what God is already saying matters *most*.

Here’s one final picture from the trip. A perfect picture of rocks that say what God says to each one of us:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.”

The last line of this passage would be enough to keep your small group talking for hours. But one question is, “What does it look like to see the Kingdom of God, and which of the people got to see it?” He said *some of you* will not taste death till you see it.

You have to back up to a phrase in the midst of the darkness that we glossed over too quickly: “...and the third day, he will be raised.” My resurrection will give you the confidence to say, “Jesus is Lord,” even in the darkest moments...

...but it will matter much less what *we* say, and much more what *God* is saying...

You are my beloved.
I still take great delight in you.
You are forgiven.
And you are free.
I love you.

We know the Kingdom of God when we know the power of the Resurrection and the love of God in our lives. Jesus tasted death, swallowed death, digested death, so that we wouldn’t have to in order to see the Kingdom of God. And we don’t have to wait for heaven. Because of the Resurrection, we can know it right now.

And in our gratitude we can confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives!

What God is saying to us is what we are about to remember, celebrate and proclaim as we gather around this table.

God cannot stay silent either.

To call Jesus the Messiah, the promised one who saves, is to say three things: that God saves us because he *needs* to (we are desperate), because he *wants* to (which he proved on the cross), and because he has the *power* to (by rising again on the third day).

Maybe one reason Jesus told Peter not to tell anyone is that he wanted people to *experience* the truth for themselves. To confess Jesus as Messiah simply because someone else said so is like the seed scattered on dry ground that couldn’t take root.

We celebrate the Lord’s Supper to *experience* the real presence of Christ. Take a moment and pray to be open to a tap on the shoulder by God in some way this morning, that you might experience God again or for the first time, and say with your whole heart, “YOU ARE, LORD! YOU ARE THE MESSIAH!”

Just like this question in Luke, let’s bookend this meal, this experience, with a sense of prayerfulness and weightiness together.

Amen.

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The Next Step **A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application**

1. Read Luke 9:18-27 again. Which verse do you think is most important?
2. Luke places this conversation with his disciples directly after the feeding of the 5,000. It also happens while or “when” Jesus was praying. Do you think either of these were intentionally placed by Luke?
3. The crowds say that Jesus could be John the Baptist, or maybe Elijah, or maybe an ancient prophet who has been raised up. What might be the significance of each of these identities?
4. After Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, why would Jesus’ next words be words of warning not to tell anyone about this? Contrast this with Jesus’ next words as recounted in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 16:17).
5. If you were with Jesus listening to his words in Luke 9:22, how would you respond? What is Jesus saying to his disciples about the character of discipleship? And

⁵ Phil 4:4

why do you think Luke leaves out Peter's response to Jesus, which Matthew includes (Matt. 16:22)?

6. In Luke 9:27, Jesus promises some of them would see the Kingdom of God in this lifetime. What would that look like? How would they know when they see it?

7. In our church and community, do we see evidence of the Kingdom of God now? How might our declaration of Jesus as Messiah impact the way we see the Kingdom of God?



Table to Table Question

A question for kids and adults to answer together

How many different names for God can you think of?
Which one do you think is most important? Why?