

**Sunday, September 13, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Who Do You Say That I Am?”**

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Who do people say that I am?

Who do you say that I am?

To whom could you ask that question?

Who knows you so well that they could describe you to someone else?

Could you answer this question about yourself?

Could you answer this question about Jesus?

We live in a world where image making is a profession.

People are hired to help others create a persona that is marketable, likeable, and attractive.

Millions of dollars are spent on focus groups and polling strategies to answer this question for political candidates and other public figures.

In our cultural quest for acceptance we have evolved (not in a positive way) to a species that is chameleon-like in our ability to change.

Rather than being influenced by what we believe, by the values that we hold, by the faith that we share, we are too often swayed by public opinion and external responses.

Who you are ought to be clear to you.

Who Jesus is also ought to be clear to you.

Most of us would identify ourselves as Christians – which means a follower of Christ.

If this is accurate, we need to be able to answer the question for others – Who is Christ?

Sunday night, after my son’s wedding, I was sitting at the campfire next to one of the young guests.

I had officiated at the wedding service, so he knew that I was a minister.

He asked me, “What kind of minister are you?”

I paused and then I said, “Christian – I belong to the United Church of Christ.”

He told me that he had been raised in a Lutheran Church and asked what the difference was.

I don't know a lot about the Lutheran church, but I said the UCC had evolved out of earlier traditions which were quite similar to Lutheran, but that we were committed to being relevant in people's lives today, hopefully paying more attention to issues and concerns than upholding traditions.

This conversation reminded me of a prayer I had come across and saved over the summer:

Dear God, put people in my life who make me think, who challenge what I believe, who make me talk about what I believe.

Give me the courage to ask questions.

Give me wisdom as I seek answers.

Help my faith to grow, not through unquestioning belief, but through thoughtful, intentional searching for you. Amen.

Sam's question was perhaps an answer to this prayer.

By asking me what I believed, what I stood for, he motivated me to think more deeply about my response.

In our passage today Jesus rebukes Peter for focusing on human things rather than divine.

Jesus' ire is directed at Peter's refusal to comprehend his fate.

Peter is simply unable to accept the predictions of Jesus' death.

He wants to hear only 'good news.'

Peter wants the prosperity gospel without the work.

Peter is the type of person who would be willing to change who he is in response to the polls.

But Jesus says, 'For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?'

What would it mean for a politician to successfully be elected to a powerful office if they had to forfeit their soul?

Power, prestige, wealth – Jesus argues that these are the devil's tools to tempt you to be untrue to your genuine self.

"Get behind me Satan" must have been a stinging retort for Peter to hear from his beloved teacher.

It saddens me to think that Peter did not understand this lesson, for it was not long after this that he denied knowing Jesus at a critical moment when he could have repeated his testimony, "You are the Messiah."

We must not be ashamed to speak of our faith.

We must invite people to be a part of our faith community.

One writer pointed out:

“There are so many ideas that come together in the Lectionary readings for this week: wisdom, the power of the tongue, and taking up the cross.

What holds all of these ideas together is the call to live with integrity.

Integrity is not the easy choice – which is why it so easily gets put aside when we face the tough moments in our lives.

Perhaps the greatest threat to our integrity is the siren call of expediency and consumerism.

It is far easier to “go with the flow” than to stand up for truth, justice and love, especially among our own family members and friends.

But, we all know the power of a life of integrity.

We have all been touched in positive ways by people of integrity.

This week, the Scriptures call us to raise the “integrity quotient” of our lives.

He continues: We live with integrity when we embrace God’s wisdom and live it out, rather than just speaking words that we do not put into action.

We live with integrity when we stay faithful to God’s ways, and speak God’s message, even though it may result in suffering, struggle and sacrifice.

We live with integrity when we acknowledge who Jesus is and proclaim him as the Christ, while understanding that he is a crucified God who calls us to take up our own crosses.

We live with integrity when our lives reflect the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and when our words are filled with praise, blessing and wisdom, rather than cursing.

When our words, our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions all align with one another, and with the ways of God that were taught and lived by Jesus, then our lives are lives of integrity and they are lives that add value and make a life-giving contribution to the world.”

Who are you? Who is Jesus?

In the end, the questions get answered together.

St Teresa of Avila, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite nun answered the question for us in her prayer:

Christ has no body now, but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks

With compassion on this world.

Let nothing disturb you.

Let nothing frighten you.

All things pass away:

God never changes.

Patience obtains all things.

Those who have God

Find they lack nothing;

God alone suffices.