

“Who Do You Say I Am, Lord?”
Pentecost 12, Matthew 16:13-20
August 23, 2020; 9:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Peter’s Declaration about Jesus

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,^[a] the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And 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. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter,^[b] and on this rock^[c] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I 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.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was^[d] the Messiah.^[e]

I. ON THE JOURNEY WITH PETER

Well, here we are with Peter again! He’s done the jump off the boat into the wild wind and waters thing, walked toward Jesus, looking up to keep the faith and courage going when the waves threaten to overwhelm him. And, lived to tell about it!

Since then, Peter and Jesus and the rest of the disciples have been traipsing all over the region of the Galilee, teaching, healing and feeding. Feeding the souls *and* the bodies of the hungry peasants. Reaching out with good news of hope and courage and strength to those living under very *unhopeful*, oppressive circumstances.

They are under the scourge of Rome, trapped in desperate poverty and starvation, barely subsisting day-to-day, but keeping their eyes on the horizon, looking up to God to help them and send a Savior. And God has sent a Savior, the Messiah, to help them, but whether or not they recognize Jesus *as* the one sent by God, still remains to be seen—by the disciples and all the many followers.

So, Jesus asks Peter and the gang: “What are you hearing? Who do people say that I am? Who do people say God is? And what do they hope for—how will God act in the world? Reveal that God does, in

fact, love and care about every single one of Her children?”

In the *asking* that Jesus does to those gathered back then, is the **question** that Jesus asks to us, **today**. And in the answering, we, along with Peter, find our **own** understanding of who the Divine is—and who **we** are. And—it’s important to note—this **changes** and **morphs**, over time and through the different chapters and circumstances of our lives.

“*Who do you say, I am?*” The question resounds down through the ages—to Peter and to **all** of us. And how we answer has huge **implications** for how we understand not only the Holy One, but how we understand **ourselves** in light of our relationship with the Divine.

For, it is a **mutual** question with a call and response answer. It is at the core of our faith and our very identity and character—individually and communally.

Jill Duffield gets to the heart of this story. Here’s the crux: “not *only* does Peter name correctly who Jesus is (the Christ, the Son of the living God), Jesus then tells Peter who **he** truly is (you are Peter, the rock upon which I will build my church). When Peter names who **Jesus** is, Jesus declares who **Peter** is.

“There is a mutual revealing of true identity when we come to confess Jesus is Lord. While we can never know God fully given our human limitations and while we change and

grow, Jesus' [claim on our lives] remains constant. Jesus is ever, always, the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Naming, knowing and clinging to this proclamation allows God to reveal to **us** who **we** are throughout our lifetime and in every circumstance. When our relationship to God is clear, our other priorities fall into place.”

Peter did not come to this great “aha moment” on his own. Jesus makes it clear that it was the Spirit of God who *gave* this knowledge to Peter. He didn’t study extra hard for the test, or read a lot of books on theology, or listen to countless podcasts on the Esoteric Nature of the Divine!”

Duffield quips that Peter: “rose to an occasion he did not see coming!” He allowed the Spirit to speak, perhaps surprising himself with the words he uttered. Our knowledge of who Jesus is comes from God when we attempt to follow, even haltingly.”

There’s a great comfort and reassurance in this, doncha think?! We can **rest** in the guidance of the Spirit; trust the Holy One to reveal Godself to us—when we’re **ready** and able to receive such knowledge and understanding. Thank you, Jesus! It’s not up to **us** and how much we study or “grasp” intellectually, but how much we enjoy God’s presence experientially.

And, with that “knowing in our bones” who Christ is, and who, we are, then, in light of being “in Christ,” we find fortitude, courage and bravery—especially for the living out of these challenging days with their

conflicting messages and priorities. “We stand a better shot at not **conforming** to this world and instead living a cruciform life of service, justice and love.” (Duffield)

WHO DOES JESUS SAY WE ARE?

So, Who does Jesus say WE are?

Who does Jesus call **us** to be in response to our naming him?

Are we Rocky? Given a new name? Like Peter got: “On you I will build my church.” Given a prophetic voice? How about Minister—every one of us? Called to care and pastor one another more profoundly than ever before?

How *was* this revealed to Peter, exactly? By the Spirit, but was it a whisper in his ear? A roaring voice in the wind or flame? How is Christ revealed to us? Through a supernatural visitation of the Divine? OR, perhaps through one another?

And in turn, how do we demonstrate who Jesus Christ is for us, as we walk around, living and breathing, serving and loving in the world?

We say who we believe Jesus to be by how we live as disciples. That’s the long and short of it. The crux of the matter.

Rev. Erin Gilmore to CUCC in her letter to our congregation last week encourages us to answer that question for ourselves *and* our community with three P’s:

*Pray: Hold this process in your prayers and continue to pray for one another, for your pastor and for this congregation.

*Praise: Look for things you appreciate in one another and share them with one another.

*Ponder: Take this time to ponder what it means to you to be a follower of Jesus and what it means to be church.

We have been in listening sessions, lo these many weeks. Now WE listen to Spirit and one another for the way forward and how we are going to love God, neighbor and ourselves in the next season of our communal life. During and after COVID. If there IS an “after COVID!” Lord willing!

COCOONS—IMAGINAL CELLS

Cameron Trimble suggests that we all—as disciples, and humans in this unique time, are like caterpillars—in a cocoon of sorts, waiting and watching to transform into butterflies.

That we (and our world) are, in fact, “imaginal cells,” right now, and a little messy and mushy, as we await what’s next. But, there’s great hope and promise in that, as we await Jesus giving us a new name and revealing God’s calling on our lives.

“The amazing part of the transformation from the caterpillar to the butterfly is that you have this middle space, the cocooning season, where your body literally becomes **mush**. You disintegrate. You lose shape. You lose everything that defined you as a caterpillar. You become **goo**. In meaningful ways, you

die to what you were.

But here is the miracle: inside that deathly mush are **imaginal cells**. These cells hold the vision of a future within them. When all seems lost and nothing that was known can be known as it was, *the imaginal cells give us the vision for moving forward*. They know that with the right conditions and a little time, a **butterfly** waits to be born.

We are mush right now. We are messy, fragile, unprotected, insecure, unrecognizable, disoriented, developing, transforming, imaginal beings. We are in that liminal space between what was and what can be.

Our becoming something better on the other side of this is *not* guaranteed. But with the right conditions, with the awakening of people to the beauty of our planet and the intimacy of our connection to everyone and everything, we have the chance to become something new.

Don't dismiss this as flowery language or overly optimistic dreaming. If ever there was a moment for **you to become who God has dreamed you to be**, it's now. Don't miss the chance. Everything is being made new, especially you.

WHO ARE WE, LORD?

Who are we, after we come out of the cocoon?

“Who do you say, I am, Lord?”

“What name do you give US, Jesus?”

*No longer what we were before,
but not all that we will be!*

Son/Daughter of Jonah, or _____ (fill in the blank). You are now: “My Disciple. Disciple of Jesus, made anew. Brought through the mush and the messy cocoon time. The Wilderness of these days of uncertainty.

On you, I will build my Beloved Community. Solid on the Rock of faith, hope and love. Will you answer the Call of God on your life?

Will we answer the Call of the Spirit on our life together? Be a church built on the solid foundation that is Christ, the Rock and bedrock of our faith?

Who do you say we are, Lord? We are yours, and we have come to answer your Call. Reveal yourself and your name to us in this time, as you give us our Name in response. Beloved Community of Christ.

Amen.