

Who Do “They” Say I Am?

Matthew 16:13-20
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Dana Livingston
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Good Morning and Welcome to College Hill Presbyterian Church! I'm Dana Livingston, member, Elder and your guest speaker today, our Pastor, Todd Freeman is on Study/vacation leave and will be back in the pulpit in two weeks. If you are visiting today please sign our registry that will be passed down the pew and if you would like to know more about College Hill or are interested in joining please indicate so and someone will be contacting you soon. College Hill is an active church and I've always believed that our announcements are a ministry, letting the congregation know how they can participate, how they can fulfill our mission to be an inclusive community of faith. Today in our bulletin.....

This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Sermon:

“Whenever Christianity has to wrestle with Jesus there is a protest...” Dr. Brandon Scott's words, written down in a notebook from my 1994 New Testament class, Phillips Seminary. I keep that spiral on my bedside table and refer to it often when I have a question about Jesus, the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Thomas and Mary and Q. I have questions about who they say Jesus is. For in their stories I find glimpses of who those early followers believed he was and what compelled them to follow his teachings. But as time passes the message is massaged and recreated to conform to a specific political or economic situation. Jesus, who he was and what was written is lost in translation. So, I re-read the statement from Dr. Scott

“Whenever Christianity has to wrestle with Jesus there is a protest...”, Look where we are today. Look where the followers of Jesus were then. Political turmoil. Caesar – Trump, Trump-Caesar.... Jew, Gentile and Jesus follower? Oppressed and Oppressor, money, corruption, poverty and hunger...nothing is new. But something over 2000 years ago was new, Jesus. And what have we done to him?

Let's first do an exegesis on this scripture: The time is 85 common era (AD), the place is Caesarea Phillipi in northern most Israel, a non-Jewish community, temple of the god Pan, the sacred ground of the pagans, . The terms, Savior of the world, Son of God, God Incarnate describe the Roman Emperor. Israel had been controlled by everyone but the Israelites and they were waiting for God to clean up this mess. Which is why in the Lords prayer we say thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, because heaven didn't need fixing but earth did! This passage originates in the gospel of Mark Jesus and his disciples, which most likely did include women, take a very long hike. And Jesus turns to Simon son of Jonah and the other disciples and asks who do they say I am and

who do you say I am? This is the place where Simon is given the name Peter "the rock", Jesus is described as a prophet and Messiah. Word Definition: The term Messiah, **The Mashiach** The term "mashiach" literally means "the anointed one," and refers to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne. The mashiach is the one who will be anointed as king in the End of Days.

The mashiach will be a great political leader descended from King David (Jeremiah 23:5). The mashiach is often referred to as "mashiach ben David" (mashiach, son of David). He will be well-versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments (Isaiah 11:2-5). He will be a charismatic leader, inspiring others to follow his example. He will be a great military leader, who will win battles for [Israel](#). He will be a great judge, who makes righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33:15). But above all, he will be a human being, not a god, demi-god or other supernatural being.

The writer knows this information and the disciples know this information which is perhaps why Jesus orders them to remain quiet, Jesus sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

We could analyze every word, and would it bring us any closer to who You think Jesus is? We have the Nicene creeds written 300 years after this scripture to tell us exactly who Jesus is...But that is another history lesson of manipulation and power.... So let's go from exegeses to the reality of today. If we heard Jesus ask Peter today "Who do they say I am? We would have a plethora of Jesus' Republican Jesus, Democrat Jesus, Evangelical Jesus and Progressive Christian Jesus. My favorite is **Red Carpet Jesus**....I want to thank Jesus, my lord and savior, for this award or the **Weather Jesus**. Jesus made a shield that protected our home and we are so blessed that we didn't get hit! I can only say that in a southern accent....Southern Jesus will get me for that! Is your neighbor whose home is devastated less blessed? **Football Jesus**...what happens when two Christian high school teams play each other? Who can out Jesus the other for Victory? Or what about the Klu Klux Klan Jesus? Jesus is white, Jesus speaks English and Jesus hates blacks, Catholics and Jews. And now we have Nazi Jesus, oh wait, no Jesus there, Hitler created his own religion that did not include Jesus. Jesus was Jewish, Jesus spoke for the "different" people, Jesus said love one another. My Jesus history has some foot in all those, except perhaps the non-jesus Nazi's, though I may have one of those in my family tree somewhere. My confirmation training tells me Jesus is my savior, that if I believe that Jesus is the son of god I will go to heaven, if I believe he is sitting on the right side of god almighty I will go to heaven but what if heaven is not up there but right here... on earth like it is in heaven. And hell is right here right now...hell is being oppressed, hell on earth to be hopefully replaced by thy kingdom come on earth. I do know that the historical Jesus wanted peace on this earth, wanted his brothers and sisters to have their daily bread they lived in real world, gritty, desperate, hungry. Jesus lived under oppression and someone believed he was a threat to the order of Rome, he upset the order in the Temple and introduced and welcomed the Gentiles in his world. I know that we are currently living in a hell... poverty, hunger, oppression, ruling by twitter. I look to the actions of the historical Jesus, the risk taker. I find hope in the

ancient writings, I find a challenge. Each of you will determine who your Jesus is and that will affect how you will live in community, love in community, serve in community and govern in community. In this space called College Hill I feel free to be vulnerable about my questions and I know Jesus loved to ask a good question. So we must question, question, question and never stop questioning “who do you say I am”?

I would like to end with an excerpt from a commentary by John Pavlovitz, *Why I'm still a Christian*. Some of you may follow his blog, he is a Christian, minister, a man who claims to say what needs to be said.

“Why do you still call yourself a Christian?”

On the days when those supposing to represent Christianity, those claiming to be speak for Jesus in the world, begin spouting their venomous bile against people because of their gender or orientation or skin color or faith tradition, an alarm goes off inside of me that screams, “This is not of Jesus and you need to remind people!”

I’m not claiming this voice in my head is Jesus, but it is a holy disturbance within me that over the course of my near half-century here, has experienced what Christianity is, what it can be, what it should be, and wants other people to have the chance to experience it too—instead of this snarling, gun-toting, flag-waving, gay-hating nonsense masquerading as Christlikeness. I want people to know that this isn’t Jesus.

I don’t believe Donald Trump or his spiritual advisors or the Republican party or the Bible Belt churches who endorse it all—are Christian in any way that remotely resembles Jesus anymore. I don’t believe First Century Jesus would find welcome in Trump’s America or in the churches who support him, because they are devoid of any of the markers of his life and ministry and have become hostile to their very presence.

This perverted religion that people are experiencing and seeing from the celerity preachers and the sanctified politicians is simply identity theft; using the name of Jesus as an excuse to be fearful and hateful and violent. Good, decent, compassionate people are right to leave. Jesus would.

**And this bastardized religion is miles and miles from the footsteps of Jesus; the path:
of humility, generosity, sacrifice, and goodness,
of loving your neighbor as yourself,
of praying for your enemies,
of showing mercy to the imperiled,
and kindness to the forgotten,
of feeding the hungry,
healing the hurting,
welcoming the stranger,
of not worshipping money,
not hoarding wealth,**

of turning your cheek,
and washing another's feet,
of sacrificing greatly,
forgiving relentlessly,
loving counter intuitively.

And in my time here on the planet, I've spent brief moments in this path, a few precious steps when I felt I was seeing it clearly—and when I've been fortunate enough to be walking alongside others doing the same thing, I've found something worth staying for, worth fighting for, worth wrestling my own doubts and fatigue and anger for. I guess that's why I stay; in the hopes that this wasn't an aberration, but a tasting of what could actually be.

I suppose I still call myself a Christian because Jesus is where I still find *life*. I do it because of the hope that like-hearted people can excavate this Jesus from the thick debris of tradition and prejudice and power lusting charlatans—and that together we can build redemptive spiritual community that *doesn't* harm, that *is* beautiful, that *does* alter the planet for good.

And so I keep seeking this Jesus and looking for people who are equally burdened to dig him out of the religion he's trapped in.

That may not be a satisfactory answer for well-meaning readers, incredulous skeptics, or self-righteous Bible-Thumpers—but it's my answer right now.

And right now, that's enough for me.

Amen.