

Trinity V

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] Here again a portion of this morning's gospel. Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?

So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am?

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. At the very heart of the Christian faith is the question of Jesus' identity.

Who do you say that Jesus is? And no other question in all of human history is as important as this one question.

It is more important than who you will choose to marry. It is more important than what you will decide to do with the rest of your life. It is even more important than who you will vote for in the next presidential election.

[1 : 23] For no other question, no other question will affect the rest of your life or shape your eternal destiny or have quite the same impact like this one question.

But who do you say that Jesus is? And today, some might say that Jesus is simply a good moral teacher.

And others might say that Jesus is simply just another great holy man. But neither one of those answers really gets to the heart of who Jesus truly is.

For this morning, Jesus is not asking us about what morals he taught or what holy acts he performed.

No, Jesus is simply asking us a question about his identity. He is asking all of us, but who do you say that I am?

[2 : 37] And the apostle Simon Bar-Jonah, or Simon the son of Jonah, was the first one to get this question right.

But he most certainly would not be the last. For after Simon tells Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, Jesus responds, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father, which is in heaven.

And I also say to you, that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church. Which means that Simon was one of the first rocks, which all other rocks would be placed upon, to build up the church of the living God.

This is why all throughout history, the church has always recognized Peter. Peter, and even the bishop of the Episcopal See of Peter, as the first among equals.

Now, please note, that I said the first among equals. Because as important as the papacy is to the Christian church, in the end, the Pope is just one bishop among many.

[4 : 01] And as we read in Galatians chapter 2, when one bishop errs, such as at that time St. Peter did, another bishop, such as St. Paul, does have the authority to correct that bishop, but does not have the authority to create church doctrine without the consent of all of his equals, that is, all the other God-appointed bishops.

But I digress, because I really hate it when this morning's gospel becomes all about St. Peter's identity, rather than the identity of our Lord.

For the apostles often fought about who was the greatest in the kingdom of God, and sadly, sometimes so do their successors. But back to the question of Jesus' identity.

Who do you say that Jesus is? And if you say that he is the Christ, then trust him. And if you say that he is the king of kings, then obey him.

And if you say that he is the good shepherd, then follow him. And if you say that he is all this and more, that he is very God of very God, then worship him and submit all things unto the Lord, just as

St. Peter did.

[5 : 40] For the question of who do you say that Jesus is isn't a question of personal power or self-gratification. It isn't even a question of whether you think or not you will go to heaven.

For this question isn't about you. It is a question about him. Who do you say that Jesus is?

For here is the one question that should put all other questions in their proper order. Should I do this or that?

Should I go here or there? And what should I do if I fail? What should I do if nothing turns out as I had planned? What should I do if I am hurt and in pain, angry or sad, tired and frustrated, or just plain numb?

Well, remember who all the faithful say that Jesus truly is.

[6 : 53] And trust that even when you act or don't act in accordance with that answer, God is still merciful. Jesus is merciful.

And as long as the good Lord gives you breath, know that you will always have another chance to make things right, just as St. Peter did so long ago.

Peter, the apostle who denied our Lord three times and wept bitterly as he heard the rooster crow.

Peter, the apostle who even though he walked on water, sank like a rock the moment he took his eyes off of Christ.

Peter, the apostle who made many mistakes, who was far from perfect, but who was given a second, third, fourth, and 70 times seventh chance to make things right, who once asked our Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother, only to be forgiven infinitely more.

For Simon Peter was a man not unlike us, but who became truly great when the Spirit of God gave him the answer to just one simple question.

[8 : 24] who do you say that Jesus is? For Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the way, the truth, and the life.

Mary's spotless lamb and Judah's fierce lion, the Prince of Peace who came with sword in hand to set right that which is wrong and to bring divine order back to the chaos of sin.

For Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. And if you believe and confess this too, then this morning be of good cheer.

For the gates of Hades shall not prevail against Christ's church, upon which the confessing Peter, as was all the apostles, holy martyrs, and evangelists, was built.

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.