

Isaiah 51: 1-6
Psalm 138
Romans 12: 1-8
Matthew 16: 13-20

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Who am I? Who are you?

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, AMEN.

If you're keeping score, today Peter gets it right. When Jesus asks, 'Who am I?' Peter responds 'You are the Christ, the son of the living God.' We never know what Jesus was thinking, but I'm betting it might have been something like, "Finally," a sweet moment like that known to many parents who finally hear an unprompted child say "Thank you for the playdate today," or even better, explain diversity to a friend. We always wonder when, and sometimes if, the millions of parental seeds we plant in our children will ever take root and flourish. Jesus might well have felt a sigh of relief. "He gets it. Now it's safe to make him the rock, the cornerstone of the church."

Because if the student at the bottom of the class aces the exam, then it's a safe bet the rest of the class will, too. Let's give Peter his due then. As the saying goes, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day."

That's not quite as cynical as it might sound. Because a short while later, Jesus is saying "Get behind me Satan!" after Peter challenges Jesus about his fate in Jerusalem.

"The fact is that Peter does not do anything on his own particularly right. He is impulsive and

opinionated, and when push comes to shove, he denies that he knows Jesus at all cornerstone or stumbling block,” writes priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor, Peter “shows us that blessedness is less about perfection than about willingness. What counts is to risk our own answers, to go ahead and try, to get up one more time than we fail.” (*The Seeds of Heaven*)

Taylor points out that perhaps “The right answer has occurred to him because he is chosen, because Jesus in his unsearchable wisdom, his inscrutable way, decided to pick a bullheaded, bighearted, fallible, stubborn, never-say-die rock upon which to build his church” which reminds me of the line that says, “God doesn’t call the able, he enables those that he calls.”

When you stop to think about it, It isn’t easy to say *who* Jesus is. Yes, we can all recite the creed and say *what* Jesus is, but how do you capture the “Who?” I recently read a quote that answers this for me: “If God were small enough to be understood, he wouldn’t be mysterious enough to be worshipped.”

So watch out when people make soundbite Gods, or tell you what God means or what God would want you to do because *they* know. I plant my feet on the high ground when I hear a relative tell a family member in the hospital that “God wouldn’t have let this happen to your baby if you’d only kept going to church.” Not helpful. Nor do I believe, true.

At one of their final encounters, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” and Peter says, three times, in fact, “Yes Lord; you know that I love you.” Then Jesus says, “Then feed my sheep.”

This, suggests Taylor, is the hinge where if we want to be able to say who Jesus is, we're better off doing it "not on our lips, but in our lives."

Which is the question we all need to ask ourselves over and over again throughout our lives; not "Who is Jesus?" but "Who am I because I love Jesus?" How do I show that love in my life? This is the soul-searching that defines our lives as Christians and our St. Peter's community. Jesus, who could be elliptical and enigmatic at times, was as explicit as he could get when he said that the one great and true commandment is to "Love God with all your heart and all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself." We are called to be in relationship with ourselves, our neighbors, and our God. Like our three branches of government they are all equal. You can't hate your neighbor and love God.

We, as a nation, in less than 70 some days, are going to define who we are in electing the next president. It's not hyperbole to say that this election is about "the soul of our nation." This point was elegantly made at the Democratic Convention by historian Jon Meacham, who describes himself as "a white Southerner and boring Episcopalian." Boring? Really? Emily, our rector, who is definitely not boring, would also add enthusiastically, that Meacham is a Sewanee graduate, her alma mater.

Meacham began his short remarks this way:

In his final Sunday sermon, days before his death, Martin Luther King Jr said, "We are tied together in the single garment of destiny. This is the way God's universe is made. This is the way it is structured. A single garment of destiny."

Meacham continues, reminding us that:

This is a grave moment in America. A deadly virus is ravaging us. Our jobs are evaporating. Our faith and the things that bind us together is fraying for our democracy is under assault from an incumbent, more interested in himself than he is in the rest of us. Extremism, nativism, isolationism and a lack of economic opportunity for working people are all preventing us from realizing our nation's promise.

So we must decide whether we will continue to be prisoners of the darkest of American forces or will we free ourselves to write a brighter, better, nobler story? That's the issue of this election. A choice that goes straight to the nature of the soul of America.

Jesus said, "If you love me, feed my sheep." He also said that "Whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me." May we all, in our votes, and in our lives, strive to become the beloved community, with liberty and justice for all. No exceptions.

AMEN