

**Sermon: September 16, 2018     Mark 8:27-38, Psalm 16:5-11: Follow, Follow, Follow**

PSALTER

**Psalm 16:5-11**

(UMH#473)

**R: Lead me, Lord; lead me in thy righteousness; make thy way plain before my face.**

<sup>5</sup> The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
**you hold my lot.**

<sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
**I have a goodly heritage.**

<sup>7</sup> I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
**in the night also my heart instructs me.**

<sup>8</sup> I keep the LORD always before me;  
**because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.**

**R: Lead me, Lord; lead me in thy righteousness; make thy way plain before my face.**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
**my body also rests secure.**

<sup>10</sup> For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
**or let your faithful one see the Pit.**

<sup>11</sup> You show me the path of life.  
**In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

**R: Lead me, Lord; lead me in thy righteousness; make thy way plain before my face.  
For it is thou, Lord, thou Lord, only, That makest me dwell in safety.**

**THE GOSPEL LESSON**

**Mark 8:27-38**

**7** <sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup> And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup> He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,<sup>[b]</sup> will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words<sup>[c]</sup> in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Footnotes:**

- a. [Mark 8:29](#) Or *the Christ*
- b. [Mark 8:35](#) Other ancient authorities read *lose their life for the sake of the gospel*
- c. [Mark 8:38](#) Other ancient authorities read *and of mine*

**Sermon: September 16, 2018     Mark 8:27-38, Psalm 16:5-11: Follow, Follow, Follow**

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked his disciples.

“Who do you say that I am?” is one of those deep, important questions of life. Just recently someone asked me, “When you look at me, who do you see?” She was asking me, “Who do you say I am?”

Sometimes on a grave stone we see a pithy statement that tells us something about who the person was. When my brother, Stephen, died at thirty, his wife and my parents came up with this for the stone: “Loving husband, son, brother, uncle, friend.” That’s who we said he was.

Pete Johnson, was the lay leader for the Grand Gorge United Methodist Church which was part of a three church charge I served back in the early 2000s. I loved that man like a second father. He died in 2007 from cancer. In the paper they said about him, “Pete’s life spoke for itself...He was a dedicated family man and was loved by his family and anyone whose life he touched.” That’s who we said he was.

Once about a year after that, I went to call the Grand Gorge United Methodist Church to speak to their pastor, Pastor Dot, but I made the same mistake that a dozen folks made while I was pastor there. Instead of dialing 7533, I dialed 7355—and, in this small town, you know what that gets you? Answer: Pete’s house. His widow, Jeannie, answered the phone and we talked for an hour and she told me this story.

She told me that she had learned from someone that she would qualify for some home improvement grants -- which was great, because the house needed some work, and Pete wasn’t there to do it anymore. So she got her courage up and filled out the paperwork and went to the hearing.

But when she got there she was met by two people she did not know and the one person said to her, “Oh, you’ll just fix up your house so that you can sell it and move to the Senior Center.” To which Jeannie said, “Well, you do not know who I am, then. My husband and I raised our seven children in this house. We never took welfare or food stamps. My Pete would work three jobs to make ends meet. We’re Adirondack people. We worked hard for everything we ever got in life. This is my home. My name is Jeannie Johnson. Who are you?”

They introduced themselves and started over, having remembered their manners and understanding much better who Jeannie Johnson is. “Who do *you* say I am?” is an important question!

Jesus asked his disciples this question, but first he asked them another one: “Who do *people* say that I am?” Now that question is a bit different because it’s a question about *reputation*. It’s a public opinion poll. I think Jesus was just a little curious. “Who do *people* say that I am?”

So they answered him, telling him all the nice things people were saying. “John the Baptist (*that would have been Herod*); and others, Elijah (*pretty cool to be compared to such a powerful prophet!*); and still others, one of the prophets (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi...take your pick*).”

**Sermon: September 16, 2018    Mark 8:27-38, Psalm 16:5-11: Follow, Follow, Follow**

But, *clearly* this was an *edited* list. I suppose Jesus might have been a little amused that they didn't say some of the other obvious answers, "A *class A* troublemaker; a blasphemer; a walking conundrum; a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." "Who do *people* say that I am?" That was a question about reputation. It was also a warm up question.

Because then Jesus asked them, "But who do *you* say I am?" That's the *real* question. Now we have a question not about *reputation* but rather of *character*. After all, "people" will say all kinds of things about us...(they will, you know)...but it is those close to us that know our *character*. And Jesus' disciple, Peter...gets this one right! For all that he gets wrong along the way—which is plenty—*this* he gets right! "You are the *Messiah*."

Oh, that *had* to have been *good to hear!* Jesus had been working so closely with them.

And now, Jesus could *finally* share with the disciples the heavy weight he had been bearing alone—which was this: It was going to get bad; he was going to be rejected, going to suffer, going to be killed.

But, *this* announcement...didn't go so well. The disciples *didn't want to hear that!* No one wanted to hear that. It was such awful news the disciples probably didn't even hear that last bit about "rising again"—whatever *that* meant. They wanted to stick with the good news: You're the One that has come to save us!

So Peter does what we all would want to do: Tell Jesus to stop talking like that. Accentuate the positive. De-accentuate the negative. But Jesus feels the temptation in that and pushes back hard—"Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Now, what Jesus said next was important. You will find that – when Jesus makes a strong statement like this, whatever he says *after* it is always important. After all, he's gotten our attention—right?!

I mean, he *could* have said something like, "Peter, you just figured out who I am; let's repeat the important point: I (*Jesus*), *am the Messiah*. Bring the people together so that we can tell them all." But that's not what he says.

Jesus *does* call all the people together...and what he had to say was *very important*. We're all ears. We're leaning in to catch his every word. But he *doesn't* reiterate that he is the Messiah; *instead*...the important message he follows with is: *Be faithful followers!*

Jesus makes three points about following: (1) Deny yourself, (2) take up your cross and (3) follow me. Eugene Peterson unpacks this nicely in his paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message* said it this way: (Deny yourself) "Anyone who intends to come with me has to *let me lead*. You're *not* in the driver's seat; *I* am. (Take up your cross.) Don't run from suffering; embrace it. And finally: (Follow me.) Follow me and I'll show you how." (p. 1825)

Who do *you* say Jesus is? Some people tell us Jesus is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that—whoever believes in him—shall not

## Sermon: September 16, 2018 Mark 8:27-38, Psalm 16:5-11: Follow, Follow, Follow

perish but have eternal life.” For some, Jesus as the ticket to paradise -- to heaven -- is who they say Jesus is! Okay. But isn't Jesus *more* than that?!

We heard Jesus, himself, this morning say there is “more” to him than *saying* he is the Messiah. And this “more” we learn by...*following!* By following. By allowing Jesus to lead, by embracing the suffering that comes in our lives for the sake of the Gospel, by following Jesus up the hills and down into the valleys until we know every step he takes and how he takes them. Who we say Jesus is, who we say the Christ is—is a lifetime reflection, one that can deepen day to day as we follow.

Homiletics professor, Alyce M. McKenzie, poses these questions: “If we have chosen Christ, then *why?* Who is he to us? Who is he to you? *Who are we becoming as we follow Jesus?*” (Commentary on Gospel by [Alyce M. McKenzie](http://www.workingpreacher.org), Professor of Homiletics at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, <http://www.workingpreacher.org>)

This is where we bring our message full circle this morning. Because who we say Jesus is, *shapes who we are*. When we claim Jesus as the one we follow, it changes us. Or at least it should. When Peter first proclaimed -- and thus claimed -- Jesus as the Messiah, he just wanted to revel in this good news. He didn't want to hear from Jesus that this had ramification for his own life if he really decided to live into it.

So, who is Jesus to you? Emmanuel? Lord? The Living Word? Shepherd? Bread of life? I have a friend who says, of the Trinity, she is closest to Jesus because Jesus knows what it is like to be human and she can relate to that. For her, Jesus is God having a human experience. I have a friend who calls Jesus, teacher, and studies his teachings deeply and with a desire to embody them. A song that I played for some of you at a meeting yesterday had these words: "It's all about you, Jesus. And all this is for you; for your glory and your fame. It's not about me, as if you should do things my way. *You alone are God* and I surrender, to your way." What if you saw Jesus as the face of God?

Professor McKenzie also said, "Being a disciple means: embarking on a lifelong journey of allowing Christ's identity gradually to shape our own. And this passage tells us the shape of that life" (<http://www.workingpreacher.org>): "deny yourself, pick up your cross, and *follow* me. Lose your life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, and you will save it." "Anyone who intends to come with me has to *let me lead*. You're *not* in the driver's seat; *I* am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how." (*The Message*, p. 1825)

Pete and Jeannie Johnson both called Jesus, Christ. They called Jesus, Savior. They called Jesus, teacher. And I saw Jesus' life through their lives. It helped me to deepen my own faith.

Who do you say Jesus is? Who do people see when they see you? As people of faith, these are intertwined. I hope you will spend your whole life going deeper and deeper into this question so that people who may never read the Bible will know who Christ is, *because they know you!*

Blessings on the journey. Amen.