



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, AUGUST 27, 2023

"Who Do You Say"

Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

INTRO TO SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:13-21

WHAT KIDS SAY ABOUT GOD...

One day my four kids under 5 were running around the house maniacally in spite of my repeated exhortations to slow down and lower their voices. All of them came shrieking into the kitchen, and I slammed my hand on the kitchen table and shouted, 'What is WRONG with y'all? Were you born in a barn?' My 4-year-old looked at me, flashed a thousand-watt smile, and sweetly said, 'No, but Jesus was, and He turned out okay!'"

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A Sunday school teacher asked her class, "What was Jesus' mother's name?"

One child answered, "Mary."

The teacher then asked, "Who knows what Jesus' father's name was?"

A little kid said, "Verge."

Confused, the teacher asked, "Where did you get that?"

The kid said, "Well, you know they are always talking about Verge and Mary."

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A Sunday school class was studying the Ten Commandments. They were ready to discuss the last one. The teacher asked if anyone could tell her what it was. Susie raised her hand, stood tall, and quoted, "Thou shall not take the covers off the neighbor's wife."

In today's passage, we can see a continuum of maturation in the hearts and minds of the disciples. At a basic level, we have people who are guessing that Jesus is John the Baptist. Is it conjecture? Something they overheard? Because if they were there at Jesus' baptism, they would know that John and Jesus are not the same person. This kind of faith or proclamation is juvenile at best and there is a serious lesson for us in today's passage to get to know Christ on a very authentic, personal level.

When Jesus asks Peter, who do you say that I am? Peter responds vehemently, from firsthand experience, close proximity, and a dynamically transformative relationship with Jesus, that he is the Messiah, son of the living God. Indeed, there is no distinction between the God of Love and his son Jesus, Love Incarnate. Again, may we know this Jesus on a very authentic, personal level.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13-20 (New Living Translation)

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

¹⁴*"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."*

¹⁵*Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"*

¹⁶*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

¹⁷*Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.*

¹⁹And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

²⁰*Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

Today's passage is a reminder to those of us within the church that our understanding of God, our proximity to the heart of Christ, and our words and actions reflect to the extent that we are in relationship with the Living God...we have many resources, songs, stories, scriptures that teach us

about God, but it is in our close following and in our life-long commitment to growing and transforming to be more like Christ that constitutes what it means to be mature in that faith.

Simon Peter, Son of Jonah, enters a pivotal conversation with Jesus. And Jesus, directly and plainly asks his beloved, who do you say that I am? It is not only a great question. It is really the only question, we should consider...before we teach another, before we judge another, before we serve another, before we say or do anything. This morning, we will baptize one of our own—Troy will be brought before God and this assembly by his parents and grandparents and all of us who consider Troy our baby, our son, our beloved. And we will answer the question, Jesus puts to Peter, as he does to all of us this morning: who do you say that I am.

And just as Peter answered Jesus' question with certainty on behalf of the fellow disciples standing there, I'd like to attempt to speak on behalf of the church today to Troy. Instead of a traditional sermon, let me proclaim the Word of God in the form of a letter to a child beloved by his family, by his church family, by his God.

Dear Troy,

My name is Pastor Eyde Mabanglo (and even though I have a Filipino last name, I am as white as they come—and you are beautiful, just as my own beloved children), and on behalf of Christ's assembly called Calvary Presbyterian Church in Enumclaw, I get to baptize you this morning. I am so excited to do so.

In many ways, you remind me of my son—not just because you are a beautiful Filipino boy, but because you are a beautiful boy (period) - beloved by God, beloved by this church and your family. Today, we celebrate this truth. Today, we proclaim this truth through the ritual, the sacrament of baptism. This is always done in the context of a church family because it is all about being a beloved member of God's beloved community.

You just turned two years old. Happy Birthday!

You are already learning so much about the love of God through the love of your family. This is the way, God wanted you to start learning about him...by the way you feel safe, secure, seen, wanted, worthy, and beloved no matter what. Your church family wants you to know this too. So, today, we are all here—all your Christian uncles and aunties wanting the best for you forever and so we entrust you in the sacred heart of Jesus and the love that we are all still learning about.

You will learn about baby Jesus and how he loves you so, because the Bible tells you so. We pray with all our heart that you also learn this from the songs that we sing with you, the stories we tell you, and the scriptures we teach you.

And as you grow, you will have questions. You will be challenged to have faith in things you cannot touch and in a God that you cannot see. You will be invited to learn about Jesus through the way that you see others, value others, and love others.

Part of learning about God is learning that God was before the whole world began and that being in nature, enjoying creation, reminds us that all truth, wisdom, knowledge, and power belong to God.

You will learn that Jesus isn't just a baby, but a man that came to show us how God understands power and might. Jesus reminds us that God's purposes is to not rule the way the world rules, but to rule in such a way that the hungry are fed, that the poor have what they need, that those wrongly imprisoned are set free, that those who wrong us are forgiven, and that we love our neighbors.

You will learn that God is a judge but be careful not to become judgmental yourself. God wants us to learn the width and depth, height and length of his love and we do that by valuing other person and learning about what the Spirit is doing in their lives.

*When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child.
But when I grew up, I put away childish things. ~1 Cor. 13:11*

We want to live in ways that please God, but we don't need to become fixated on doing things to gain God's love, because God loved us from the

beginning. This is important, on the day of your baptism, we want to encourage you to not get stuck in an adolescent way of understanding faith.

I think these two verses from our scriptures help us to understand this caution:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ~Ephesians 2:8

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ~Phil 2:3-4

As you grow up in your family and in your church family, we hope that you will continue to be curious about God. We know that you will have many more questions and that will show that you are growing and maturing like Peter matured in his relationship with Christ.

Like a really strong relationship with your parents or a best friend, you may have strong feelings about your trust in God. As you grow up, you will see how God wants you to use your mind and experiences to learn about him too. Study the scriptures, but it is okay to study people too. Make sure that you find people in your world who are not overconfident in their ideas or narrow-minded. God's love is so very big, you want to make sure that you don't get too stuck if the people around you have also stopped learning.

There's an ancient idea about sometimes a student becomes the master. This means that sometimes, a student needs to find another teacher who might be able to show them more. Even Jesus applied this idea when he was preparing to leave his disciples.

John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father."

Today, we will baptize you with water. Because of the story of Jesus' own baptism in Scripture, we know that the Spirit is also here. We call baptism a sacrament because it was a practice instituted by Christ himself, but we also

call it a sacrament because it still contains quite a bit of mystery. One of the things that you will learn over and over again is that following Christ often means embracing mystery. It is okay to not have all of the answers but keep being curious and look to Jesus as the perfecter of your faith. Sometimes humans are just guessing. God doesn't guess.

Different people, different generations, different cultures all experience Christ. Part of your faith will be looking for Christ in all questions, seeking Christ in all mysteries, and trusting Christ despite uncertainty.

As you grow and mature in your relationship with Christ, you will move from understanding Jesus as a baby that loves you to Jesus as Messiah, son of the Living God. This is what Christ means, the anointed one as like a king. And to make Jesus king or lord or savior of your life is to make him an anointed one in your heart, ruling with the law of love...not judgement, immaturity, arrogance, or other childish ways.

You will come to see that God is the primary actor in every conversation and every situation and that you, too, have an obligation and role to be humble and wise and compassionate and loving...just as Christ is all these things, because God is all of these things.

To be mature in your faith (which could come at anytime) is to love life. This includes loving life for yourself and life abundant for all people. As you learn to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself, you will put your faith in action more and more every day, every year...you will challenge the ways things are that do not honor your neighbors and you will work to create justice in this world, in this life—on earth as it is in heaven.

Dallas Willard—The gospel is less about how to get into the Kingdom of Heaven after you die, and more about how to live in the kingdom of Heaven before you die.

Listen again to Matthew 16:17-19

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock') and upon

this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. Peter, I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

I hope that you will remember that you were baptized on the day before the 60th anniversary of Dr. King's March on Washington in 1963. Dr. King was a pastor who understood that his faith was about God's love in action for his community and for the world. The march marked the occasion of his "I have a dream speech", but it was about seeing every person as a beloved person and lifting up a sacred vision of all of us being a part of Beloved Community.

Like you will, he grew up in the church—listening to the stories, singing the songs, and learning the scriptures. Like you will, he set aside childish ways and adolescent thinking, he continued to be curious and allowed the Spirit to show him a dream for all of God's children to know true justice and enjoy life on earth as it is in heaven.

I wonder when Jesus asked Peter, who do you say that I am...if Peter understood to the heights, depths, width and length that Christ would challenge him to be the ROCK to build his beloved community. Peter was only beginning to see how God would use him and his fellow disciples to share a message of power—the power of reciprocity, mutual love, and amazing grace.

"Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God." – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit."— Martin Luther King Jr.

"We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies." –Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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After the christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

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Today, this preacher wants everyone to be brought up, matured, and transformed in a Christian home, we are so grateful that you get to stay with your parents and your grandparents and with all your uncles and aunties at Calvary.

Troy, you are beloved.

Welcome to Calvary, Welcome to this Faith Journey of transformation.
Welcome to being one of God's agents of Love in this world, Welcome to God's beloved community.

Sources—

www.timburt.org

James Fowler, author of Stages of Faith

<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/faith-formation-in-children-teens-and-emerging-adults/>

May it be so. May it be so.

