

I want to put a thought in your minds today at the start of this sermon ... it is a thought especially for those of you who are younger, and you can decide for yourself once you hear the thought if this includes you. I have never, ever had the opportunity to play Guitar Hero, which is probably a good thing, but as you think about today's Gospel Reading, is there any chance that Peter with his seemingly quick, decisive and important response to one of Jesus' questions was playing "Disciple Hero"? Think about this and we will come back to this in a few minutes.... Does Peter deserve to be in the 'Disciple Hero' Hall of Fame?

Some of you know that this past summer my father took Janice and I on a cruise for my 5th birthday – he was 25 years ahead of my 50th birthday! Many of you have cruised too and know the usual drill that for Dinner you have an assigned Table but if you go to the Dining Room for Breakfast or Lunch you just have to take your chances with who is at your table!

One breakfast time, when the three of us were at the table several folks already seated were beginning to introduce themselves to one another, where they were from etc. when a woman arrived at the table and announced to all of us without any prompting, "I am a bit unusual, I have a Divinity Degree." Janice and I – we both had to own up that in this table of eight she was not quite so odd as the two of us had Divinity Degrees! Undaunted, she told anyone still listening that she was some sort of Baptist and she was engaged in a new exciting study concerning the role of women in the Bible." We did not want to burst her bubble by suggesting that such a thought was hardly a new one! She then insisted that Presbyterians have M.Div. as their terminal degree.... Needless to say there was a whole lot more affable, intelligent, engaging, enjoyable conversation after our fellow traveller with the divinity degree finished her lunch and left the table....

Back in the day, there was always a lot of conversation about Jesus, there was always scuttlebutt on the streets about Jesus, about His identity and His purpose. People had their opinions concerning everything Jesus did and said; about the clothes Jesus wore, the food he ate, who sat with Him at the dinner table, the company He kept, the places He visited, the people with whom he talked. Everyone had and everyone has an opinion: the High Priest in the Temple and the bishop in the cathedral; the spies of Pilate and Herod and the religion columnist in the local paper; the seasoned observer of the Province of Judea and the twenty-something blogger; the woman at the well, the Canaanite woman from last week and the woman who cuts your hair! Everyone, at least pretty much everyone has an opinion about Jesus...

Some say Jesus is the King of the Jews, some Mary's boy. Some say Jesus is the light of the world, others that He is a prophet without honor in his own country. Some would point out that Jesus is the one who can heal your child, cast out your demon, forgive your sins, and maybe He might also help lead a revolution. Some view Jesus as the one whom you should invite to dinner, while others won't be seen dead with the teacher from Galilee. Jesus is messiah, prophet, rabbi, a thorn in the side, a pain in the neck, a disturber of conscience. Jesus is here, there and everywhere; Jesus is alive, dead, risen, ascended and Jesus will come again.

In part, the great thing about Jesus is that you don't even need to be a follower of Jesus to have an opinion, to understand that Jesus is big, that Jesus is an influential figure on the stage of world history, as a teller of tales, a worker some say of miracles, a moral example, a Savior, a Lord, indeed the Savior, the Lord.

Thus no surprise that Jesus Himself had some questions, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" We hear that Jesus asks this question while he was with the disciples up near Caesarea Philippi. This places

them about 120 miles north of Jerusalem, well beyond the reach of the religious leaders and the usual suspects. This city was a great community of faith and counter-faith, of varieties of truth, of testimony and counter-testimony. Herod had built a temple there to honor the Emperor, Caesar Augustus. Pagans had long worshiped Pan and Baal there. It was here that Jesus asked His questions staring with, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

The disciples, looking around at each other, somewhat slowly and sheepishly; clearing their throats offer a politically correct response: "Well Jesus" they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." You can almost hear the disciples minds ticking over, "Take your pick Jesus! If you like one of these mantles, pick it up and wear it and that will help us know more about you and who you really are, because quite honestly Jesus, we don't always know what to think about who you are and what you do and all the stuff that happens to you and around you – help us out Jesus – gives us a clue Jesus, give us an answer Jesus!

Hearing their answer, and we are not sure whether Jesus was encouraged or discouraged by what they said, Jesus gets more direct. Jesus says to them, forget "some say", forget the focus groups, and the opinion polls, cut to the chase, get to the point, "You, you – you, who do you say that I am?" Cue Peter our candidate as Disciple Hero, or "Are you smarter than a High Priest?" or "Galilee's got talent" or "Andrew's Big Brother" – "You, Jesus", Peter says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." "GULP!" "WIDE EYES" "GASP" Messiah, the Anointed One, the Promised One, the Expected One, the long-awaited One who would bring God to humanity and humanity to God, the big, wild, unruly, disturbing, life-changing Messiah! The Son of the Living God! The Son of God, the child of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Aaron and Gideon and Eli and Samuel and David and Solomon and Isaiah and Jeremiah, all the way down to John the Baptist! This, all this, and more, Peter voiced in the response he offered to this question, Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

My friends this is the stuff of Disciple Hero fame, this is riffing and catching the chord and strumming and strutting, this is SOMETHING INDEED! Peter is doing his stuff - Head banging – though it is not good for you – head nodding – and for sure Peter ends the head scratching: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

The implications of this statement are so enormous that the Lectionary cuts this incident in two and so next Sunday we will read and hear the second part of the incident. Next week when we are here for Welcome to Oakland – Welcome to Winthrop Sunday, when we get to wear our college colors to church, we will read about yet more implications of this question and Peter's declaration about the identity of Jesus.

Today we need to receive two truths about Peter's answer to Jesus' question.

First of all we need to recognize that this statement concerning Jesus describes exactly who we are. To be church together means to be have our full and complete focus on Jesus Christ above and beyond and before anything else in heaven or on earth.

Secondly we need to pay attention how quickly Jesus moves Peter from confession of faith, "You are the Christ," to begin to see his vocation, his assignment as a follower of Jesus: "Upon you, Peter, the Rock, and this truth you are affirming, concerning my role and identity, I will build my church." Jesus moves

Peter almost instantly from belief to action, from a declaration of conviction to a vocation; from a creed to a lifestyle. This is a focus that very easily connects with the reading in Romans 12 with its focus on those who believe becoming “living sacrifices” as they live their inner faith.

The Christian faith, rooted in the ability to affirm the truth about Jesus: “You are the Christ” is much, much more than a philosophy of life, it is a way of life. To confess Jesus as Christ inevitably means that we desire to conform our lives to this Christ. Believing and obeying, go together, this is how we are to respond to the Son of God.

Think about it in this way, Peter confesses who Jesus is and then immediately Jesus tells Peter who Peter is. Peter confesses his belief in what Jesus is up to, then Jesus tells Peter what Peter is to be up to.

When Peter says, “You are the Christ,” Jesus does not unpack the phrase, and its meaning, instead Jesus tells Peter what he, Peter, means. “You are the Rock, and that means that you will be the basis of my church. I’ll give you the keys of the kingdom. You will be able to bind and loose, to pronounce forgiveness of sins.” Peter first of all says who Jesus is and then, at once, Jesus tells Peter who Peter is and tells Peter what Peter must do.

Are you ready for this challenge today? You are here to a great extent because you wish to affirm your belief in Jesus the Christ. Now you are asked to be ready to see and hear and receive all that Jesus believes about you. Will you receive, accept and act upon whom it is Jesus will now name you? Are you willing to hear and bear the plan that Jesus wants you to embrace. Sure, you believe in Jesus, but today you are hearing that Jesus also believes in you, in us, in us all!

I don’t often tell a story that depends on a pun but this one seemed so perfect for what it means for us to hear, receive and act upon who it is Jesus calls and names us to be and do.

It is a story about some friars, (spelling) F.R.I.A.R.S who has fallen behind on their belfry payments, and so they decided to open up a small florist shop to raise the necessary funds. Since everyone liked to buy flowers from the men of God, the rival florist across town thought the competition was unfair. He asked the good fathers to close down, but they would not. He went back and begged the friars to close. They ignored him. He asked his mother to go and ask the friars to get out of business. They ignored her too. So, the rival florist hired Hugh MacTaggart, the biggest, roughest, meanest, most vicious thug in town to “persuade” them to close. Hugh beat up the friars and trashed their store, saying he’d be back if they didn’t close up shop.

Terrified, they did so – thereby proving . . . Are you ready for this???? Wait for it!!! . . .that Hugh, and only Hugh, can prevent “florist friars”.

On this Rally Day, as we move into a new church program year, as we look to embrace all the opportunities for worship, outreach, relationships, discipleship and support by which we can express our faith in Jesus Christ, as we launch Together on Wednesdays, a new the midweek opportunity to share Faith, fellowship, food and music as a way of helping us grow in our spiritual lives and as a way of welcoming and including others fully into the life of our congregation: Hugh and only Hugh, You and Only You, can receive, declare, share your living of the faith built upon your declaration of trust in Jesus as Messiah, Son of God.

“Hugh and only Hugh”, You and Only You, can serve God in the way that You and only You can.

You and Only You can love and live, learn and care, share and serve in the way You and only You can.

You and Only you can bear witness to the impact that Jesus Christ is having in your life today.

You and Only You can speak truth to power out of your life experience; you and only you can come alongside the person who is hurting or in need to express God’s love; you and only you can teach, advise or encourage using your unique gifts.

It is You and only You whom Jesus commissions and needs to be fully engaged in the life of this church, to help us be the Body of Christ together.

To each of you, to all of you Jesus names who you are and identifies what you need to be and do. Only as the whole body fits together, can we best express the love and justice and mercy of God. You and only you have a pledge to make, a commitment to continue, an offering to fulfill, a calling to be lived.

Today, Jesus keeps on asking us: "You, you, you, who do you say that I am?" Seeing our answer of faith, Jesus names all of us and send all of us to the tasks that are ours – trusting our Savior or as we might say, Rocking! Rocking without rolling over, as we devote our lives to the entire purpose to which God is calling us and naming us, all of us. God has a purpose that You and only you can carry forward, Hugh and only Hugh, Rocking without rolling! Amen.