

Who Am I?

Isaiah 50:4-9

Mark 8:27-38

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Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Isaiah 50:4-9

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

Mark 8:27-38

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?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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.”

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. 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, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words 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.”

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An old man turned ninety-eight
He won the lottery, and died the next day
It's a black fly in your Chardonnay
It's a death row pardon two minutes too late

And isn't it ironic?
Don't you think?

It's like rain on your wedding day
It's a free ride when you've already paid
It's the good advice that you just didn't take
And who would've thought? It figures

Well, life has a funny way of sneaking up on you
When you think everything's okay and everything's going right

And isn't it ironic?
Don't you think?*

Alanis Morissette's 1996 hit song points out some of life's absurd moments. Just as a dream comes true, it is yanked away. Just as something should happen, it does not. And isn't it ironic, don't you think?

Isn't it ironic for Peter? He gets it, he finally gets it. Like the others, he has stumbled along the way as a disciple, a student, of Jesus, and now yes, he finally understands and grasps just who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, the long awaited Anointed One who has been promised by God and the prophets for a long, long time. The Messiah is here, and it is now; and Peter, a fisherman from Galilee, is in his midst, in his presence.

Israel has been waiting for, praying for, hoping for, the Messiah to deliver them from the Roman occupation. The Messiah would be a royal military leader who would overthrow the enemies of Israel and be honored by the Jewish religious leaders as king. Israel would be redeemed, be restored politically, and he would give the definitive and true interpretation of the law to establish Israel's religious and ethical revival. Jesus, the Messiah, would do all of this.

Peter was one of the first disciples called when he was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who had excitedly exclaimed that he had found the Messiah. Peter has been a follower, a witness, to incredible healings of body and mind, he has heard Jesus speak in parables and as one of the inner circle he heard those parables explained so the riddles would be demystified, and he has twice seen thousands of people fed with only a few loaves of bread and pieces of fish. He saw Jesus heal his mother-in-law shortly after they first met. Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, and Peter proudly, excitedly, proclaimed this when Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Without hesitation, Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." Peter knows that Jesus is not John the Baptist, Elijah or another prophet returned from the dead, nor is he a new prophet. He is THE Messiah. The others may not yet understand, but Peter does, Peter knows.

Then, isn't it ironic? The long awaited Messiah who should next be revealing his battle plan to end the Roman occupation and oppression, his strategy to revive the faulty morals influenced by the pagans and the Gentiles, and to teach the true interpretation of God's laws for faithful living, instead begins to teach the catastrophic news for the first time that he, "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."

How can that be? That is not what or who the Messiah is supposed to be! In horrified shock and confusion, in grief and in anger, Peter rebuked Jesus, Peter denied Jesus' words. Jesus is the Messiah who has already brought so much healing, hope, renewal, comfort and relief. He has the tongue of a teacher in order to sustain the weary and teach those who want to learn. In the midst of those who challenge him he turns the other cheek, he is not put to shame. He

encourages us to stand together against adversaries. So then, what is all of this talk about suffering and death and rising again? What good is a dead Messiah? How can the Messiah be conquered by those he is to conquer? Jesus the Messiah must be strong, bold, a warrior and a king, not one who is tortured and rejected. To Peter, Jesus the Messiah has just upended everything that the Messiah was supposed to be and do. Jesus the Messiah has not yet done anything, said anything, about taking on the Romans, or revealed any political ambitions, but for Peter's Messiah, this must be something that has just not happened yet---perhaps it will begin when they arrive in Jerusalem.

Peter's response, "You are the Messiah," is rooted in long standing Jewish messianic expectations, yet are they really all that different from what we want, what we want to expect, from Jesus our Savior, Jesus our Redeemer? When Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?", don't we want to answer that Jesus Christ is the One who will rescue us from the troubles in our lives and in the world, the One who will set us on the path to truly understanding God and faith and meaning and purpose, the One who will bring about the values, ethics, morals, welcome and joy of God's kingdom on earth for all humanity and all creation, the One who will forgive us all our trespasses, our debts, and bring us home to eternal life?

When Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?", he spoke to Peter and the other disciples, yet the question is still out there today for each of us to answer, "Who do you say that I am?"

At the same time Alanis Morissette was asking, "And isn't it ironic?", there was a WWJD bracelet craze. WWJD—what would Jesus do? Wearing this simple bracelet was to be a reminder of how you answered the question of 'who is Jesus', as you responded in a Jesus-like way in any given situation to demonstrate the love of Jesus through your actions.

Peter's rebuke is met by Jesus' rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Pastor and missionary Elisabeth Johnson has a wonderful insight for us on Jesus' rebuke of Peter. "This is one of those moments in Scripture that highlights the vast distance between us and God. Though Jesus is God with us, we cannot tame him or make him over into our image. We would like a savior who is a winner, and one who makes us winners, but Jesus insists on identifying with the lowliest of losers. He will allow himself to be judged and condemned as a blasphemer by Jewish religious leaders. He will allow himself to be mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the Romans. And that's not all. Jesus actually expects his disciples to follow him on this path of suffering and death. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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, will save it.

Jesus speaks of losing our lives for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel. Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences might be. It means putting Jesus' priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security. It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them for others — using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience God's love made known in Jesus Christ."

Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" For us the question is not about the title—Messiah, Savior, the Resurrection and the Life, Prince of Peace, Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, or the Lamb of God---that is the easier part. The question for us is deeper-- how do we understand what the title means so that our expectations align with God's?

Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Amen.

**Isn't It Ironic*, written by Ballard Glen, Morissette Alanis Nadine