

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Proper 19, Year B, September 16, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Saying and Showing Jesus"
Mark 8:27-38

today kicks off our Annual Giving campaign; you will receive a letter later this week from our Annual Giving Committee, which is Jan Massey, Tom Murphy, and Missy Pixton, along with Senior Warden David Fagiano, and me, and your pledge card will be in it; I encourage all of you to think and pray deeply about what your financial pledge will be for the coming year, and also to think and pray deeply about the other kinds of giving you can do with your volunteer participation; our pledge card this year emphasizes this by having two sides to fill out: one for your financial commitment, the other for your commitment of volunteer participation; every one of us has God-given gifts of energy and creativity and know-how; there are innumerable ways to share our gifts with the church and through the church

I also want to point out that at the very same time as your pledges are coming in, the Search Committee will be interviewing candidates for your new Rector; those candidates will be asking hard questions about the financial strength of the parish and the volunteer involvement of parishioners; they will want to know what level of resources the parish will have at its disposal next year, the first year of their ministry with you; so your giving will have a direct and important influence on candidates' desires to accept a call to serve here with you; please give that consideration as you think and pray about your pledges

related to our Annual Giving Campaign is our series of eleven Sundays, each one focusing on one of our Vestry Commissions, starting today with Outreach; Jesus asks in our Gospel passage today, "Who do you say that I am?;" but recall my sermon from two weeks ago about the importance of being "doers of the word" as the Epistle of James (1:22) put it; those words remind us that the most effective witness to faith is not just what we say about who Jesus is, but also how we show who Jesus is; I hope you will take advantage of all of our Commissions' presentations at Forum time and again during fellowship following the later service; it is in each of our Commissions, perhaps more in Outreach than others, that we find this powerful combination of saying and showing who Jesus is to us; so today I want to look closely at who do we say and show Jesus is, by breaking Jesus' question down into its parts, into smaller questions

first: who?; who is Jesus?; if someone were to ask you, just how would you respond?; there are plenty of good answers from Scripture, from the prayer book, from theological and popular Christian writers; but is there an answer that specifically relates who Jesus is to you?; is he a person to you?; is he a presence to you?; is he a way of life to you?; just who would you say he is, in your own words, if someone were to ask?; because what you, from your own personal experience, have come to know of who Jesus is, is an extremely powerful thing to express; no one can argue against what you yourself have experienced; there can be no more powerful statement of faith than who you yourself have experienced Jesus to be

next: do?; do we ever actually share with other people who we believe Jesus is?; do we avoid the subject entirely?; do we wait to be asked?; or do we seek out opportunities to share our faith and our understanding of who Jesus is with someone who does not know or who is not sure?; if we actually believe that knowing Jesus makes a difference in our own life, why wouldn't we want to share that knowledge with others, so that they too could experience a difference in their lives?; can there be anything more important that we would want to share with someone else than a life-changing recognition about who Jesus is?; I don't believe there is

next: you?; many people believe that telling people about Jesus is someone else's job: clergy, Sunday School teachers, missionaries, or others who act in some official capacity for a church or other religious organization; but telling people about Jesus is every Christian's job; there are so many people who, even if they have heard about Jesus, still do not know what it means to live in relationship with him; it takes Christian businessmen and businesswomen to share their faith in a meaningful way with other business people; it takes Christian retirees to share their faith in a meaningful way with other retirees; it takes Christian young people to share their faith in a meaningful way with other young people; and so on for every imaginable type of person and personality, in any family, any workplace, or any place of recreation; anywhere you go there will be people who do not really know who Jesus is; it takes people who have shared the same experiences in life to be able to speak about something so deeply felt and experienced, and to make it meaningful to others; you may be the only Christian to cross paths with and have the opportunity to share your faith with a person who may want and need to learn about Jesus; would you recognize that opportunity if it presented itself, and be ready to act on it?

next: say and show? I often hear people say that they would rather show their faith than talk about it, but the risk of misinterpretation is always great if we only show our faith without any saying to accompany it; many people do good things, motivated by all kinds of reasons; but if Christian faith is your reason, why not be explicit in such a way that no one can be mistaken about your motivations?

finally: I am?; notice that the question is not who was Jesus?, in the past tense—which in some practical ways is almost inconsequential; who Jesus is, right now, is a far more important question; the implication of the present tense being that Jesus is, now, acting, influencing, guiding, challenging, empowering, protecting, loving, and being present in us and to us, in others, and in the world about us; Jesus is asking, “who am I—to you, right now?”

these may be simple questions, but they are ones with profound consequences—for us, and for the world around us; the way we answer these questions can make a big difference, for us, and for those with whom we share our faith; my hope and prayer is that we may already be prepared to answer them; or if not, stay tuned for an opportunity to help you become prepared to answer them; and answer them as quickly, as convincingly, and with the same credibility as Peter did; our answers to these questions do much to determine our relationship with God in Christ and may very well lead others into that important relationship too