

Who is Jesus to You?  
October 27, 2024  
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*Note: These are sermon notes and not a formal manuscript.*

Who is Jesus to you? This is the question our bishop asked me standing at the altar during my ordination to the diaconate. For those who might be unfamiliar with the process, a person on the path to the priesthood has two ordination - one as a deacon and one as a priest. Having been to several ordinations, I always wondered “what are they talking about up there with the mics off?” Somehow I didn’t expect the bishop to ask such a direct question.

Who is Jesus to you?

If I had been asked on any other day, I think I would have said, “healer” or “friend” but a surprising word came out of my mouth in the moment. Savior.

It was an unexpected response for me because the way Jesus LIVED has always been more compelling to me than the way he died. Yet, there I was with the word, “Savior” pouring out from a deep, unknown space within me. And I uttered it in such a way that it felt like my whole soul exhaled. As if all the discernment, and course work, and the interviews were all over and I could simply just be in the presence of God and all of God’s people.

I heard the echo of that question in today’s reading. Bartimaeus, as a blind man, would have most likely been a fixture at the gates of Jericho. Where else could he go? It is one of the oldest known cities in the world so at the time of Jesus it was well established with thick defensive walls and served as a hub of activity. Sitting by the gates, he would have heard many things and maybe had his finger on the pulse of the town more than anyone else because it would have been socially invisible to many. I

bet he overheard a lot. People would have talked in a more unfiltered way because he wasn't really noticed.

The news of Jesus would have been shared as people passed and Bartimaeus most likely pieced all the stories together into his understanding. A healer? A king? A friend? The Messiah? A threat to the system? All true. But more importantly, what Bartimaeus had clearly figured out who Jesus was for him. "Jesus, Son of David"... the one they had been waiting for... The one who could restore his sight and his place within the society. Jesus was the one who could redeem the perceived brokenness and bring him a newness of life he hadn't known.

A savior.

Jesus' response was, "what do you want me to do for you" but the subtext is the same as the bishop's question, "Who am I to you?". Last week, this question coming from James and John was about status. This week, it is about relationship. A yearning for wholeness.

The crowd shushed Bartimeaus but he persisted. He had already answered the question for himself - Jesus was his healer. He believed it enough to throw off his clock, trusting that he would no longer need it. He knew that coming into the presence of Jesus with a firm belief that life could be different meant he could shed the mat, and the clock, the possessions that spoke of stationary existence for something more. Before the healing even took place, Bartimeaus was already transformed by his faith. Jesus didn't even need to physically touch him to know that Bartimeaus' life was forever touched. Changed. Enlivened.

Up until then Jesus told those who were healed to go on with their lives and tell no one. As he entered Jericho... and ultimately Jerusalem... there was a shift. It was now time to be unafraid of telling the stories of transformation because there was no turning back and people had to decide, "Who is Jesus to me?"

Jesus told Bartimeaus to rise up in a very similar way to how Jesus himself would rise up at the resurrection and because of him, we all rise up with new life. It wasn't just about receiving sight, it was about giving Bartimeaus the vision that put him on the road to discipleship.

When we take this into our personal lives, the healing stories from scripture can be a gift of inspiration or encouragement ...and at the same time they can be a source of questioning and hurt. What if we pray and call out to Jesus but healing does not come like we seek? How do we keep faith when our prayers don't seem to change anything?

Those wonderings are real and I have known them in my own life. The truth is that the ways of God are a holy mystery. I don't say that as a nice sounding cop out. What is NOT a mystery or left to chance is the promise that God... Jesus... the Holy Spirit remain with us always. Even when life doesn't make sense. Even when our prayers feel unheard. ...Even when our hearts are breaking. Jesus meets us there.

Jesus says, "Follow me. I am the way". It may not be the easy way but there is life there. A fullness. A promise that endures. The Dutch priest and theologian, Henri Nouwen, names a lovely yet challenging truth, "The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it."

Our understanding all hinges on how we answer the question, "Who IS Jesus to me?"... to us. It brings our relationship with God into focus. It orients our whole worldview in a pretty specific way, if we are thoughtful about it... and then actually live as if it were true. The life of faith is a life of action.

As we read the creed this morning and as you come forward to receive communion, I encourage you to consider who Jesus is for you. We have given names like "bright

morning star"... "Son of God".... "Redeemer"... or even our namesake "Messiah"...but what is YOUR word, born from your experience?

If you are willing to share your word in the receiving line, in a text, by phone, over coffee... or whatever form works for you, I would love to hear them. I imagine each word to be a small gift or a window into your hearts... and journeys.

After the healing, Jesus gave one cue - "Go". Not return to his life as he knew it but go out with the assurance that his faith mattered...that our faith matters.. and changes us... It is the place from which the promise of new life springs. The place where our hearts' desire are known... honored ... and seen.

There is nothing outside of the care of God. We can take our direction of the psalmist and be like "those who dream". How we may sow tears and yet we will reap songs of joy. That the seeds that are sewn within each of our lives will bear fruit that speaks of who we know Jesus to be in our lives.

Jesus' instruction for Bartimeaus to, "go" is a sending story. We also are told to go. At the end of the service, the dismissal to 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" is not just a suggestion. It is our own calling story and invitation to action. How will you love this week? How will you serve this week? There is no end to the possibilities. The question is how will you live it out?

So much of it depends on who Jesus is for you. Just like I was so surprised by my answer to the bishop, you might also find yourself surprised. You may not be able to articulate a word yet. That is okay.

Here's the good news. Jesus has already figured you out. You are a beloved Child of God.

Amen.

