

May the words in my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, oh, God. Amen.

I was born into a Christian home, and I grew up in a church that came out of the Jesus movement in the 1960s. So, as you may imagine, Jesus was a big topic of conversation in my life growing up. I prayed to Jesus, I talked to Jesus like a friend, and I carried him with me in my heart from a very young age. Now as an adult and a newly ordained priest, I'm still seeking to answer this question that Jesus poses to his disciples in our gospel reading today. Who do you say that I am?

And I'm realizing that I will never fully know the answer to this question because I am continually changing and growing in my life of faith. So, my relationship to and understanding of Jesus is continually changing and growing too. When Jesus asks his disciples this question, they answer with the names of prophets, drawing on Israel's history. But Jesus pushes the question further, deeper into their hearts in asking, "But who do you say that I am?" Jesus is asking the disciples to set aside all the rumors and all the hearsay, and instead draw on their own experiential knowing of who Jesus is in the present moment as his closest friends.

And Peter always willing and ready to participate, answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." Jesus is affirming that Peter has come to an understanding of who he is within himself, not just through an external source, but through what he has personally seen and experienced and it is well-founded.

Up to this point in Matthew's gospel, Peter has witnessed Jesus' teaching in the synagogues, healing people of all kinds of spiritual and physical ailments, ministering to crowds and imparting wisdom. Peter even saw Jesus quiet a storm causing the disciples to marvel, "What sort of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Now at this point in Peter's journey of faith, he realizes that Jesus is like the prophets before him, but based on his personal experience, Jesus is also

the Messiah, or in Greek *Christos*, Christ, the anointed one. And Jesus has been a messiah to Peter. Jesus has shown Peter a clear path to know God for himself. The way to be transformed by the renewing of his mind as the apostle Paul says in this morning's epistle.

And this is not a stagnant set of beliefs or a doctrine that Peter has to subscribe to, but a dynamic process of being transformed and renewed within relationship to one another. And this will be a process that will allow Peter to uncover his true identity and carry out his calling as the rock the church will be built on.

So, I pose this same question to you, who do you say that Jesus is? And how has this understanding grown and changed alongside your continually unfolding life of faith? Perhaps you have known Jesus as a historical person whose story is recorded in the scriptures, which sounds straightforward, but even then, it can be challenging to let Jesus be authentically who he is, to allow space for difference from our own life experiences so that we don't form Jesus into our own image. When I was six, my mom gave me a little plastic framed picture of Jesus that you might be familiar with. He had long light brown hair and pale blue eyes and pale skin. And one day I took this picture out of a drawer in my room, and I marched into the kitchen, and I announced to my mom, "This isn't what Jesus looks like." And my mom said, "Oh, what does he look like?" And I said, "Not this."

I don't remember what I knew about Jesus's appearance at this young age, but I do know that as an adult I've had to unlearn many assumptions I've had about him. Unlike me, scripture tells us that Jesus was Mid-Eastern, so he probably had brown skin and dark features. He spoke Hebrew and Aramaic, which sounds a lot like Arabic. If he was standing here today, he would be unlike anyone else in my life. And while there are many gifts within Christianity, Jesus was in fact, a dedicated and devout Jew. Jesus didn't come to start a new religion, but to reform the one that he had been born into. He loved his Jewish people, he loved his Jewish traditions, and he was realigning them to

God's love and values. He was showing them that God's love is more universal than they could even imagine. That it's for the Jews and the Gentiles, for people in every time and every place and on all spiritual paths.

renewing our minds, as the same spirit that dwells in Jesus dwells in us? So may this be our expectation and our experience today. Amen.

Yet while Jesus isn't Western white or even a Christian like me, I still relate to him in a deeply personal way. And people from all walks of life do too. Art throughout the centuries shows Jesus virtually depicted in all different cultures. There's Asian Jesus, there's Black Jesus, there's indigenous Jesus, White Jesus, and even art that depicts Jesus in all different genders. Everyone can see themselves in this captivating person. Jesus doesn't belong to any one type of person or group because he embodies the complete human experience. He is the full incarnation of God's love that is inside every single one of us.

So, this question can't just be answered individually because we need the entire diverse body of Christ to fully know who Jesus is. So, who might we say that Jesus is as we join together in worship this morning at St. James? How is Jesus being made known to us? Perhaps like the mystical communion of saints that the author of Hebrews says is always surrounding us, Jesus is a mystical presence, here, in our time of corporate worship. And as the two men on the road to Emmaus said, who met Jesus in his resurrected glory, "He has been made known to us through the breaking of the bread," or as our right one Eucharistic prayer says, "We are being made one body with him that he may dwell in us and we in Him."

And what if we came to church not only with this awareness, but with this expectation, with the hope of encountering Jesus's living presence in his particularity and in the ways we can relate to him so intimately and in the ways he is mystically here among us now, present in the gathered body of Christ? And what if we came to the Eucharistic table with the hope of encountering Jesus, being made known to us in the sacraments of his body, the bread and the wine that knit us together as one body, just as they knit into each one of us, transforming us more into Jesus's likeness and