

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Dear Friends in Christ:

The question of Jesus in today's Gospel, "*Who do you say that I am?*" took on new meaning for me after attending a conference a few weeks ago. The presenter, in an earthy and humorous way challenged believers to **"Get off Your Donkey: Help Somebody and Help Yourself!"** The Biblical imperative was the parable of the Good Samaritan, and perhaps you recall the setting; a religious scholar who came to Jesus to test him, asking: "*What do I need to do to get eternal life?*"

Jesus turned the question around, asking him, "*What's written in God's Word?*" And the man answers, "*That you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and that you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself!*" "Good answer," said Jesus, "*do it, and you'll live!*" But looking for a loophole, the so-called religious scholar asked, "*And just how would you define neighbor?*" Thus, the parable:

"There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his

way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'

What do you think? [Jesus asked.] Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" "The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, "Go and do the same." (Luke 10:25-37)

The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

In other words, as the conference presenter challenged us, *"Sometimes, you just have to get off your donkey!"* Or, if we used the King James Version, it's more akin to a more colorful word for donkey, referenced in the Old Testament in connection to Balaam, and no it's not *"mule,"* but *"Get off your [duff] and do something!"*

On most occasions in the past when I have preached on “*Who do you say that I am?*” the focus has been on words, encouraging everyone to join the Apostle Peter in making the confession of faith: “*He is the Christ the Son of the living God!*” **And He is!** I just can’t imagine making it “*through*” all the crud that comes our way without faith in Jesus! There are way too many “*robbers and thieves*” out there, situations and circumstances that leave us wounded, beaten and broken, sin and death doing their thing while we’re hanging onto life by a thread, and the rest of the world seemingly passes us by! It is vital that we, the church, the people of God, stand together week after week after week boldly confessing, “*You are the Christ!*” “*I need you in my life!*” “*I believe! I believe!*”

But we also need to hear today that Jesus Christ is not simply an “*app*” that we download into our hearts, accessed only when we come to this building, or stored up in some distant cloud calling upon His name only when we need his help or blaming him when everything goes wrong! The fact is Jesus has downloaded us into His heart, calling us in Holy Baptism to be His children, inviting us not only into a loving and faithful relationship with Him, but also with our “*neighbors!*” This is how the kingdom of God comes to others in this world, when we “*get off our donkeys*” and help someone else, just as the Samaritan did; just as Jesus “*got off his donkey*” and helped us!

Remember Jerusalem, Palm Sunday, **humble and lowly, and riding on a donkey?** *“Hosanna to the King...arrested, condemned, crucified, beaten, wounded, bleeding, dying...people standing by watching...sin ratcheted to the highest threshold...my God why have you forsaken me...a cross, a spear, a crown of thorns...the Christ, the Son of the living God dying, rising, forgiving, loving and promising to be present always!”* You want to know how much God loves the world - just consider Jesus **getting off His donkey**...for this [*pointing to the Cross*]...for us!

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks. It’s so much more than words, isn’t it? There’s got to be a dismount from the people of God, *“presenting ourselves,”* as the Apostle Paul writes, *“as living sacrifices...not conformed to this world, but transformed!”* In other words, as followers of Jesus we are to live *“questionable lives”* - people wondering why we choose to care about them when others could care less; choosing forgiveness when others hold on to resentment and anger! **“Who do we say Jesus is,”** for example, when we decide how and where to spend our time, write our checks, and plan our calendars. **“Who do we say Jesus is”** the next time we have a disagreement in the home, or a temptation is presented, or find ourselves in a relationship that is unraveling, or encounter someone who is in need of a helping hand or a reflective, listening ear? *“I believe you are the Christ the Son of the Living God”* – well *“big whip”* and *“whoop-de-do”* if Jesus never

matters in our conversations, or influences any of the decisions we make or the actions we take!

So, just what is it that God wants us - not only to **say and believe** - but to **do** as a result of our time here at church? You see, my friends, it is not simply here, but on the road out there, along the way of life that the proverbial donkey travels? Oh, there may be some out there be on that camel, just trying to make it to “*hump day*,” but aren’t we all in need of someone to care, and don’t we all need to be looking for some way to serve?

So, this week, I challenge you, as I was challenged, “*Get off your donkey: help somebody and help yourself!*” Experience life in the Kingdom of God - and by so doing you will reveal who you say Jesus really is!

May God bless you in the journey! AMEN.

Note: This sermon is greatly influenced by the book and presentation: Get Off Your Donkey: Help Somebody and Help Yourself, by Reggie McNeal, © by Baker Books. The book can be ordered from most on-line book publishers.