

ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)

SERMON:

12 SEPTEMBER 2021

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

READINGS: Proverbs 1:20-33//Psalm 19//James 3:1-12// Mark 8:27-38

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Let us pray

*O God “Our thoughts are not your thoughts and our ways are not your ways”
We open our hearts and minds to your spirit that you might help us to get out
of our own way and hear what you have to say to us*

A 6 year old boy explained basic Christian theology to his younger sister, “You see, it was Jesus’ job to die for our sins; it’s our job to sin!”

A teacher was standing in the school hall, teaching the 7-11 year olds about Jesus. Standing there with a red-bound book entitled, "Stories of Jesus" he said to the assembled children, "Children, if Jesus were to come here today, what would you say to him?" A little boy declared, "I would show him the book, and then I'd say, "Jesus Christ, This is Your Life!"

I was listening to the heartbeat of a child at work one day. I asked the child, "Who will I hear in your heart?" The child replied to me, "Jesus, he is in my heart." This response totally touched me. I'm so glad this child has Jesus in his heart.

When my daughter was four years old, a beloved kitty died. She was thinking about Snowball (he cat when we were driving somewhere. She said, "Is there a cat heaven?" Before we could answer her question, she added, "If there is a cat heaven, there must be a cat Jesus." ...

In Mark 8v29 we read “*What about you? Jesus asked “Who do you say I am?*

Mark begins his Gospel by announcing that he is writing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1v1). In the very first verse He makes some bold claims: That Jesus is the promised, anointed One of God. Mark makes this declaration and then he writes the Gospel to show the evidence of this claim, that Jesus is really the Christ, the Son of God.

In the first eight chapters of the Gospel, Mark records the teaching, miracles and healing stories of Jesus to prove that Jesus is no ordinary man, but that He is in fact the Son of God. And while many come to Jesus and even say positive things about Him, they could not see this.

Even the disciples had, by this point, been with Jesus for over two years. They had been taught by Him personally; and they had heard Him teaching the vast multitudes many times. They had watched as He performed miracles; and they had even helped assist Him as He met the needs of others. They had seen Him command the wind and the waves, heal the blind, give hearing to the deaf, and clean the lepers clean, and cast out demons with great authority. They had heard the things that He had said about Himself. They had known what the Old Testament Scriptures promised about the Messiah; and had seen personally how He had fulfilled those promises.

But even the disciples were spiritually blind they could not see Jesus as the anointed Son of God. Their dullness (lack) of faith and slowness to believe can be seen throughout the Gospel, but it becomes particularly evident in chapter 8. (Mark 8:17-21) when Jesus rebukes the disciples for their blindness and deafness. After this rebuke Mark tells the story of Jesus healing a blind man.

And this is where our Gospel text of today starts. After healing the blind man Jesus and His disciples travel from Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi Jesus takes an opportunity to ask the disciples some questions.

Jesus asks a general question: *Who do people say that I am?*

The disciples share with Jesus that many people think positively of Him. They consider Him to be like one of the great prophets of the Old Testament or perhaps He's continuing the ministry of John the Baptist – who was also well respected. Jesus impressed the crowds but they could not see that Jesus is far greater than a prophet.

But then he asked them in v 29 *What about you? Who do you say I am?*

It's important to notice that Jesus didn't ask His disciples, "What do you think about my teaching?" Nor did Jesus ask, "What do you think about my miracles?" or what do you think about my commands?"

You see this is a personal question who am I to you // what do I mean to you

And Peter answered “***You are the Messiah***”

It is evident that as much as Peter’s eyes have been opened in his identification of Jesus as Messiah the disciples are still not seeing clearly

Jesus “the Christ,” at this point in the story, Peter declares, “I think you’re the one who will purify our society, who will re-establish Israel’s supremacy among the nations, and lead us into a new era of peace and holiness. The one who will free us from Roman Empire.

Peter gets the title right, but the meaning wrong.

You see this is a personal question who am I to you // what do I mean to you

Are we not sometimes like this if people ask us: ***Who is Jesus ?***

We will most probably answer

He’s the Son of God,” or “He’s the Saviour who died on the cross for our sins—He’s God.” We rarely hear people you say, “He is my Lord, and I follow Him.”

Or, “He gave me a new heart that only wants to follow Him and obey His Word.” He has transformed me

Do we know who Christ is—not merely in our head, but in our heart? Not merely in belief, but shown in our behaviour? Each of us answer correctly with our mouths, but our heart and life say something different. We say Christ is our God, but we live as our own God.

The crowds thought well of Jesus, but good thoughts of Jesus are not enough.

It’s not enough to acknowledge Jesus as a good teacher or leader. Only those who see Jesus as the Christ and trust in His sacrifice on their behalf and have a personal relationship truly know Jesus.

Who do you say I am? (What does Jesus mean to you)

As soon as the disciples have identified Jesus as Messiah he begins to teach them what kind of Messiah he is to be. In v 31 we read “***The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death and three days later he will rise to life***”

The picture that Jesus starts to paint of suffering, rejections by those who were looking forward to the coming of Messiah, death and rising again was totally unfamiliar and radically different to the expectations and understanding of that time.

Because the Jews wanted a Messiah for political purposes, as a conqueror and liberator from Rome.

And then in v 34-38 Jesus makes it clear what the expectations of those who follow him should be.

“If anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever lose his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?”

You will agree with me Jesus’ description of discipleship is anything but attractive or easy.

Let us unpack these verses and try to understand what Jesus is saying

Firstly Jesus is saying if anyone would come after me he must ***deny*** himself

This isn't Jesus' way of telling us we must deny our personality, die as a martyr, or even live a hermit that is detached from "things." Instead, Jesus is saying the self (The I) should be displaced and renounced. Life was about the self. (me) Now it must be about Christ. This means self leaves the throne of our hearts, and Christ now sits upon it.

Self-denial, reminds us that our life is not our own. It belongs to God. It reminds us that we are not in control, God is. Our life is not about us. It is about God

Secondly Jesus says we must carry our ***cross***

We sometimes think that our cross is anything that is unpleasant, like cancer or lack of employment, But 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

It means speaking out against injustices, poverty, racism, GBV even if it means others will condemn us

It means — using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience God’s love made known in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly Jesus says Follow Me” – The true disciple of Jesus turns his back on his self and his old life. The true disciple of Jesus takes up his cross and is willing to lay down everything for the glory of God. The true disciple of Jesus takes his place behind the Lord and he follows Jesus wherever He leads. The true disciple walks in total obedience and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

What about you? Jesus asked “Who do you say I am?”

My dear friends Do you know Jesus and are you willing to *deny yourselves take up your cross and follow Jesus.*