

February 24, 2013  
Questions for Questionable Times

*Who is Jesus?*  
Matthew 16:13-16

**Opening words:** Last week, I began my newest sermon series, *Questions for Questionable Times*. We are looking at the basic questions people are asking about the faith. Once completed, we will have answered these three questions.

1. **Where is God?**
2. **Who is Jesus?**
3. **Am I accepted?**

After we have answered those questions, we are going to answer basic questions people asked during Holy Week:

1. **Why cheer?** (Palm Sunday)
2. **Why remember?** (Maundy Thursday)
3. **Why suffer?** (Good Friday)
4. **Why hope?** (Easter)

The question for today is: who is Jesus? The answer comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew 16:13-16. At the very heart of the text is the issue of identifying Jesus correctly. How do you answer the question, who is Jesus? It is important that you answer that question correctly. Do you understand Jesus is the long awaited Messiah or Christ? Do you know Jesus as your Savior? Do you know Jesus as your Lord? I hope the answer to each one of those questions is YES! May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson. *Who is Jesus?*

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**Matthew 16:13-16** <sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

<sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>15</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

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Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962) is considered one the greatest violinists of all time. It was common for him to tour Europe. One day he was traveling to London from Hamburg, Germany. He was traveling by boat but had an hour before it sailed. To kill the time, he walked into the local music stop. The proprietor asked if he could look at the violin Kreisler was carrying. He then vanished and returned with two policemen, one of whom told the violinist, "You are under arrest." "What for?" asked Kreisler. "You have Fritz Kreisler's violin." He responded, "I am Fritz Kreisler." They responded, "You can't pull that on us. Come along to the station."

As Kreisler's boat was sailing soon, there was no time for prolonged explanations. Kreisler asked for his violin and played a piece he was well known for. "Now are you satisfied?" he asked. They were, and Kreisler performed in London on schedule.

You know it is true. Each one of us has an identity. The truth is each one of us has more than one identity. How many hats do you wear in life? Let me use myself as an example. I have been out at the mall and someone will walk up to me and say, "Aren't you the preacher?" I have married or buried one of their loved ones. You know me as your pastor. My parents knew me as their son. My sisters know me as their brother. Kathryn knows me as her husband. My children know me as father. My neighbors know me as the guy in the red house or the guy who is always walking his dog. My plumber knows me as the guy who knows nothing. My buddy Rick, who doesn't go to this church, knows me as ... I better not tell you. However, you get the point. Each one of us is an individual, but each one of us wears many identities.

Over the past few years, our world has become very concerned about our identities because we now have something called identity fraud. You know identity fraud. It is when someone pretends to be someone else. It always costs the victim money. Did you know identity fraud is one of the fastest growing crimes in America? How many victims of identity fraud do you know? It is important to identify people correctly. Identity is at the very heart of this morning's Gospel lesson. Let us look at it together.

We find ourselves today in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. The story is not unique to Matthew. It is also found in Mark and Luke. In each account, the disciples have been traveling with Jesus for some time. They have experienced a great deal. They have grown comfortable with Jesus, yet they still find him to be a great mystery. There is just something different about him. He does things that no one else can do. He is the only one they know who can heal the sick. He is the only one they know who can calm the most violent storm. He is the greatest teacher of their age. Without any formal training, he teaches with both authority and insight. He loves the most unlovable people and handles his confronters with ease. They have experienced a great deal with Jesus, but the Master wants to know if they truly understand. To test their understanding Jesus asks the twelve two questions.

This is question number one: **Who do people say the Son of Man is?** Verse fourteen gives us their answers. It says, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Jesus listens to their answers, but he really doesn't care. It is like going to a spring training baseball game. It is entertaining, but it has no value. The Master is more interested in their answer to the second question.

This is the second question: **Who do you say I am?** The disciples know the significance of that question. Silence fills the air. Each one of the disciples heard the question, but not a single one wanted to answer it. They didn't want to answer incorrectly. A few seconds later, only Peter's voice is heard.

He said, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*" He answers correctly and suddenly everything changes. Any question of Jesus' identity has been answered. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Today, I am going to ask you to identify Jesus. Do you believe that Jesus is just a fable from the past, like Paul Bunyan? Do you believe Jesus was just a wise teacher or philosopher? Do you believe Jesus is the ultimate friend, who believes in you when you don't believe in yourself? Or do you believe Jesus is more? Do you believe Jesus is the Christ? Do you believe Jesus is the Savior, your only hope of salvation? Do you believe Jesus is your Lord? What difference is Jesus making to your daily life? Who is Jesus? This message will dig into your soul and will force you to examine your ways. That is a good thing because this is the season of Lent. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **Christ**

Who is Jesus? Do you understand Jesus to be the Christ? Verse 16 says, "*Simon Peter said, 'You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.'*" The Hebrew word *Messiah* is the Greek word *Christ*. That verse is vital because for generations the Hebrews had been waiting for the Messiah. The problem is their understanding of the Messiah was all wrong. They understood the Messiah to be the great problem solver. There was no corner of life that would be changed once the Messiah came. When the Messiah came, there would be no more violence. When the Messiah came, there would be no more disease. When the Messiah came, no one would be oppressed. When the Messiah came, everyone would be well-fed and happy. When the Messiah came, their lives would be perfect. Do you know of anyone who is frustrated with Jesus because their problems remain? If you do, then you know someone just like Peter. His generation's assumptions about Jesus are all wrong. Listen to what I am about to say.

The word 'Christ' is a title. It is given to Jesus more than 5400 times in the New Testament. The authors of the New Testament writings understood the sacredness of Jesus. He was not just another good person. He was the greatest person who ever lived. Do not take those words lightly. There are over seven billion people in the world this morning. I have no clue how many have lived in the world from the beginning of time. The total number of people is astronomical, but there has only been one Christ. His name is Jesus. He was the son of God; he was the incarnation of God. You know it is true. There is something about that name. If you have identified Jesus as the Christ say, "**Amen!**"

### **Savior**

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Savior of the world! Do you know Jesus as your Savior? I hope your answer is YES! The salvation of your soul depends on it. That is why Jesus came into the world. Do you remember the story? We talked about it just a few weeks ago. Mary and Joseph were betrothed to be married. Don't just jump over that phrase. In their world it meant a great deal.

It meant they were legally bound, but they were still physically innocent. Mary was a virgin, yet Mary was pregnant. Joseph was placed in a difficult situation. He decides to divorce her quietly, but one night he has a dream. In the dream he is told to take Mary as his wife. The child in her womb is truly unique. This child will be the greatest life that ever lived. Matthew 1:21 says, *"She will give birth to a son and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* A savior is one who protects us from harm. If you have identified Jesus as your Savior say, **"Amen!"**

### **Lord**

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Lord! What does that mean? It can refer to two things. First, you can be describing the very nature of Jesus. For example, Jesus is *the* Lord, or Jesus is God. Second, you can be describing your relationship with Jesus. Jesus is your Lord or Jesus is your Master. When you are in bondage to someone, you must do what they say. They are your Lord. How many people do you know understand Jesus as the Christ? How many people do you know have claimed Jesus as their Savior? How many people do you know have grown deaf to their Master's requests? They want Jesus as their Savior because they want to go to heaven. They haven't claimed Jesus as their Lord because don't want to change anything about their lives. Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Less than a year ago, my wife, Kathryn, had a wedding in the Cleveland area. The bride and groom were former Youngstown State University students, Katie and Ben. I didn't have any responsibilities at the wedding, so I got to play out my favorite role, the minister's husband. I love that role because it is undefined. You can do what you want. I do nothing but tag along. I went to the rehearsal and sat in the pack pew of the church playing games on my cell phone. When the rehearsal was over, Katie's mother walked up to me and asked me if I was Kathryn's husband. I said, "Yes." She said, "I have someone you have to meet. He looks just like you! He will be at the reception tomorrow." Prior to the wedding, Katie's mom walked up to me and said, "Have you seen someone who looks just like you? It is Katie's uncle." I said, "No!" We went to the reception and ate. As the dancing was about to begin, we decided to leave. I was putting my coat on when Katie's mom returned. She said, "Did you see him?" I said, "No!" She said, "Don't go anywhere. You have to meet him because he looks just like you!" We promised to stay. I will admit I was a little nervous about meeting my double. I looked over the crowd and looked for someone who looked like George Clooney. It didn't see anyone but I soon saw her return. She was dragging a man who looked like Rodney Dangerfield on steroids. As proud as could be, she looked at us and said, "You two could be twins! Do you see it?" I said, "Yes!" and shook his hand. I looked at him and said, "It is hard to believe there could be two handsome studs like us at the same reception." He sucked in his huge Texas size stomach and said, "I hope we don't intimidate these young guys!" It is a question of identity.

Who is Jesus? Is Jesus just an historical figure who said some good things? People are always quoting Jesus. Is Jesus just a teacher who got the ages to think? We are still wrestling with some of his quotes. Is Jesus just your friend?

The one you turn to when life is hard? Or is your understanding of Jesus deeper, more mature? Does anyone here know Jesus as the **Christ**? He was the son of God, the greatest life that ever lived. He never committed a single sin. Does anyone here know Jesus as their **Savior**? His perfection made him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Does anyone here know Jesus as their **Lord**? Are you actually doing what Jesus said, or are you picking and choosing, like at a yard sale? Mother Teresa once said, *"Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is to love Jesus."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**