

Title: “Who Do You Say that I am?”

Chris Ryan	Mark 8:27-35	1/18/2025
Service Readings: Acts 4:8–13, 2 Peter 1:1–15, Mark 8:27–35 <i>The Christ we want vs. the Christ who saves.</i>		

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”

The people of this world may be divided in many things, but they are united in this way: they are seeking a god, seeking something that brings meaning to themselves. For many, the god they seek is a god of the world: fame, money, and the like. But for Christians, we are clear about who our God is: it is the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we proclaim Christ just as Peter did: “Jesus is the Christ. He is the one who the Father sent to offer as a sacrifice for our sins. He is the one who was beaten, striped, and nailed to the cross. He was the one who received the cup of the Father’s wrath. Jesus. He is the Christ.”

But here is the problem: just like Peter, we confess Christ rightly—and then resist Him when he tells us who that Christ must be. You see, after Peter’s confession, Jesus begins to teach what it means to be the Christ:

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

“Get behind me, Satan,” Jesus says to Peter! Why? Because Peter had a misaligned understanding of who the Christ was and how it was to effect his life. Instead of aligning his understanding to Jesus, he insisted that Jesus align to his. Peter had filled the title *Christ* with expectations that Jesus simply refused. Peter wrongly believed that a Christ, a Messiah, was one who could claim victory without conflict, authority without suffering; a Christ who could achieve glory without the cross. This was the Christ that Peter desired and wanted to follow. He wanted to follow Jesus upward into glory, not downward into suffering. Peter wanted a Jesus who would affirm not just his expectations, but also the implications on his own life. In this way, Peter’s true desire was to *lead* Jesus, not follow him.

So Jesus rebukes him and says, “Get behind me, Satan,” because at its core, Peter is doing what Satan has always done. He is affirming Jesus’ identity but rejecting Jesus’ mission. We saw this play out in the garden when Satan tempted Adam and Eve. He offered them glory without obedience, life without dependence on God. And Satan tried it again with Jesus *himself* in the wilderness. There he offered the Son of God authority *outside* suffering and obedience.

Get behind me, Satan, indeed!

Ah, but if only we could isolate this sinful desire to Peter and those first parents. If only we could hide behind the acts of Satan: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate,” Eve confessed. But we can’t. We stand before God just as naked, just as exposed in our own sin. We stand as Peter and cry out to Christ – “Conform! Be the Christ I long you to be, the Christ my sinful flesh desires.”

You see, our earthly desires long for a God that conforms to the wishes of our personal world. We want a god who is known by his power and might over our enemies. We want a god who finds victory through that power, not through suffering. We want a god who acts in strength, not in weakness, one whose salvation looks impressive, not shameful. We want a god we can be proud of.

And so we go searching for him. Some search for churches that affirm with their way of thinking, that preach a god who condones and even embraces alternative lifestyles. Or maybe a god who can be manipulated with a seed of faith offering. Or maybe a god who rewards those with the proper amount of faith. For Lutherans, these false beliefs are easy to see through and even dismiss, but make no mistake, we are just like Peter. We desire to define our god, our Christ, our Messiah, our Savior. We want a Christ who will offer us salvation but not ask us to follow in his suffering.

We want a Christ who will not disrupt our lives. Maybe it is by avoiding conflict through silence. Who in your family or circle of friends are not active Christians? Who have fallen away from the church? They still believe in God, confess that their faith is just as strong as ever, but just can’t be bothered from worshiping each week? Do you stay silent because you don’t want to rock the boat? Maybe you are looking for a Christ that saves you eternally but asks little of you publicly.

Or what about forgiveness and grudges? Do you have an estranged parent, sibling, friend that you harbor resentment towards. They have hurt you – make no mistake. And that hurt is real, and it is deep, and it is true. There is nothing good about it. And the world tells you that you have every right, every privilege to resent and hate. And you need a Christ who will agree with you. You need a Christ who will hand to you salvation that he earned through the suffering of those who hated him. A Christ who forgave them, but doesn’t ask you to forgive those who hurt you.

You see, we *all* desire some sort of false Christ. Some want a Christ who forgives our sins, but does not ask us to forgive those who have hurt us. Some want a Christ who gives us eternal life, but does not interrupt the life we have carefully built for ourselves. Some want a Christ who blesses our children, but does not challenge our priorities. Some want a Christ who conquers our enemies, but not one who calls us to suffer rejection for his name. Like Peter, we confess him rightly—but then we pull him aside and say, “Surely not this way.”

But this is not the Christ that Jesus came to be. His power was hidden in human flesh. His salvation was earned through obedience and suffering. Eternal life was won through death and its defeat. You see, the Christ that God has revealed to us is a Christ who suffered, who was obedient, a Christ who aligned perfectly to the Father’s will instead of asking the Father to align to his. And in this way, Jesus became our Christ, our Messiah. Through his suffering he earned life eternal for each one of us.

And he calls us to himself, to confess him rightly, to each him accurately, and to defend him vigorously. And we can’t do this without also taking up our own cross. This does not mean that we must look for suffering. Nor does it mean that we earn anything before God *through it*. And it especially does not mean that suffering somehow completes the work that Jesus began. What taking up our own cross *does* mean is grounding our life entirely in what he has already done. It means living as one who has already died and already been raised. In your baptism, your old Adam, the one who demands Christ without a cross, has been put to death. A new life has been given to you, a life that is hidden with Christ in God.

So, taking up your cross means living without illusions, believing that forgiveness is stronger than resentment, that confession is stronger than silence, that obedience is stronger than fear, and that death itself has been undone by Jesus' resurrection.

And when you fail, when we fail, when we drop our cross and begin to redefine Christ, this passage offers us comfort. Jesus did not abandon Peter after his rebuke; he did not send him away. Instead, Jesus continued to Jerusalem and he carried the cross Peter rejected. Jesus died for this disciple who misunderstood him, and he died for us. Jesus rose from the grave for Peter, and for us.

Today, Jesus asks you, "Who do you say that I am?" You can answer with faith:

You are the Christ.

The Christ who suffered for me.

The Christ who died for me.

The Christ who rose for me.

The Christ who walks with me—even when the road leads through the cross.

And because he lives, because his suffering was not the end, neither is ours.

To him be all glory, now and forever.

Amen.