**Text**: **Mark 8: 27-38**

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

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 “So, who do people say that I am? And, even more importantly, who do YOU say that I am”?

These two questions come from Jesus, to his disciples…and that means, because you and I claim to be disciples of Jesus, these two questions come to you and me.

The writer of Mark’s Gospel sets these questions smack-dab in the middle of his Jesus’ story: here we are, in the 8th chapter of a 16 chapter story. CENTER of Mark’s Jesus’ story. CENTRAL question for Peter, James and John and all the other disciples. And equally, the CENTRAL question for you and me, the 2018 faces of those who follow Jesus.

The first seven chapters record that Jesus was very busy: teaching people about mustard seeds, getting his disciple-crew together and giving them their instructions for mission, feeding the 5,000 (and then the 4,000), stilling that bad storm and then walking on water. Plus healing people all along the way.

So, Jesus says as he looks at the disciples: what are people saying about me? Well, some say you are Elijah, come back from the dead---fulfilling what God promised in Malachi 4:4: I will send my prophet Elijah to you before the day of the Lord. Some, like Herod, say that you are John the Baptist, raised from the dead. Jesus listened and then pushed the envelope a bit further:

**But you…? What does all of this look like to YOU? WHO am I to YOU?**

**This question serves not only as the center of the Gospel, but also as the turning point in Jesus’**

**ministry. Three times in the next two chapters, Jesus will tell the disciples that he is headed to Jerusalem and once there, he will be betrayed, suffer and die.**

**None of his disciples wanted to hear that prediction.**

And so it is, that this question sits among us, modern-day disciples, just as central to our faith lives as it was to those early disciples: who do WE say that Jesus is?

Does it matter how we answer that question?

Do we really HAVE to answer that question?

I think we DO have to take this question seriously…let it live in our hearts and in our minds…and come up with an honest answer. This question is NOT a test from Jesus. I think Jesus gives us this question so that we can examine our own faith lives. I also think that our answer to this question will define and describe our actions, our words and our following of Jesus.

Jesus as teacher? We will pay attention to his parables and his stories…

Jesus as healer? We will come to Jesus with all those broken places in our lives…

Jesus as Savior? We come to Jesus for forgiveness so we can begin again…

So, I truly think this question and our answers are of great significance. We can…and should…answer the question individually. We also should face this question as a congregation: who does Bethel Lutheran say that Jesus is? Our congregational answer will shape our ministries. When candidates for lead pastor here at Bethel are interviewing us…and when we interview any candidates…that question should be part of the conversation.

Look in the Emmaus Room today…you will find many ministries represented that define who Jesus is to the people here at Bethel. We believe that Jesus cared about those who had no way to find food and shelter, so we have active food pantry and homeless ministry, and a Circle of Love golf outing that will

provide funds for Habitat for Humanity houses. That’s only ONE of Bethel’s answers when Jesus looks us in the eye and says: Who do you say that I am?

Let’s go back to our own individual answers. When you ask me, how shall I answer you? When I ask you, what will you say?

I envision and experience Jesus asking me that question ALL THE TIME ! So many times, in all honesty, I look at Jesus and tell him that I am not sure how to answer that question. Teacher? Yes ! Healer? Yes!

Savior and Redeemer? Yes ! I want my answer to direct my words and my actions. As I sit with Jesus, often our conversation ends with me, repeating Peter’s words: Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. And Jesus takes my hand, reassuring me that his love for me does not depend on my right or wrong answer. Jesus simply invites me to believe that he will never leave me or forsake me, that even my lack of a pro- found declaration of certainty and faith will never have the power to separate me from his eternal presence with me.

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of your question and for continuing

to hold me, feed me and guide me. And so, Jesus, take my life and all that I am,

and consecrate/hallow me for discipleship in your kingdom. Amen.