

From The Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, September 12th, Pentecost XVI, Who do you say I am?
Proverbs 1:20-33, Psalm 19, James 3:1-12, Mark 8:27-38

It seems to me there are two parts to this gospel this morning. The first part is answering the question about who Jesus is for ourselves. Jesus begins by asking who the people say I am, and then asks who **they** think Jesus is. That means we are to listen to what others think and say, and learn about Jesus and God from them, but ultimately it means deciding for ourselves.

The second part is what are we going to do about our answer? Jesus is showing the way by talking about going to the cross to die and then in three days rise again. That means to follow Jesus is to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow. This definitely has an element of sacrificing what we want or expect in both the short and maybe long term. But it a very real way is not so much focusing on what we are giving up, but what we are gaining and in essence finding meaning in our lives. So it is more about connecting than just sacrificing. This means making the choice to sacrifice for the benefit of others. Most parents make sacrifices for the benefit of and for their children. And in any real relationship there is sacrifice and some form of compromise.

I have mentioned another way of understanding taking up our cross. That to take our place on the cross as a metaphor suggests the vertical piece represents our relationship with God, and the horizontal piece represents our relationship with each other. So then losing self is not so much about not getting our own way as seeing the value of being in relationship.

This by definition seems to be, bringing out both the best and worst in each of us. This somehow presents a mirror for us to see ourselves and hopefully get a chance to change for the worst and improve the best.

I keep coming back to the concept of forgiveness. We do not grow in our spiritual journey in a direct or linear way, but it is interesting that the psalm has *and one night imparts knowledge to another.*

The night and the darkness is a time for creative thinking and looking outside the box. At least for me there are different times of day for different functions and activities. The left side of the brain for math and problem-solving is for the morning and the early part of the day. Leaving a problem overnight or some task involving numbers is better left for the next morning when I seem to be able to either

accomplish the task in less time, or better able to take my time and am less likely to make a mistake. Later into the night is my time for creativity and imaginative thinking. Thoughts and conversations on deeper theological and philosophical topics seem to make more sense later in the day with a less task or problem solving agenda is in effect.

This doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the sermon, and the questions Jesus is asking. But just maybe the question who is Jesus is not just a one-time question. This is an ongoing question because it is about an ongoing relationship. But not just with Jesus but with our neighbours and ourselves. That is the sense of the summary of the law: *hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

So to be in relationship is to keep asking the question, who is God in Christ for me, as well as who is my neighbour, and who am I as well. One way of being in relationship is about understanding. There is understanding God, neighbour and self. Sometimes this occurs at the same time.

Amen.