"What Kind of Christ"

Mark 8:27-38

September 16, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

In 2015, Scientific American had a cover article about what scientists think Jesus really looked like.**From the first time Christian children settle** into Sunday school classrooms, an image of Jesus Christ is etched into their minds. In North America he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with long, flowing, light brown hair, fair skin and light-colored eyes. Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed. A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered. Surely the authors of the Bible would have mentioned so stark a contrast.

On the contrary, according to the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane before the Crucifixion, Judas Iscariot had to indicate to the soldiers whom Jesus was because they could not tell him apart from his disciples. Further clouding the question of what Jesus looked like is the simple fact that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus described, nor have any drawings of him ever been uncovered.

There is the additional problem of having neither a skeleton nor other bodily remains to probe for DNA. In the absence of evidence, our images of Jesus have been left to the imagination of artists. But with the advent of DNA analysis from bones near Jesus' time from forensic anthropoligists, we can make some good guesses. Many scientists and biblical scholars think that Jesus was probably a lot like Palestinian men of his time, which means that he had darker skin, his hair was probably black and cut short. The average man of his time was about 5'1" tall and weighed about 110 pounds. Not the blonde-haired blue eyed man from many more modern paintings.

What does Jesus look like for you? I bring this up today because we often think of Jesus as someone like us, someone who not only looks like us, but has the same needs and wants, he was human after all. Jesus wants what we want. And we're not the only ones who thought that. Peter certainly had that same thought. This passage, perhaps the most pivotal in the entire gospel of Mark, shows us some vital things about Jesus and about Peter and about us.

Up until now, Mark, the great storyteller, has been asking the question, "Who is Jesus? Who is this who can heal the sick and feed the multitudes? Who is this who can speak to the wind and the waves and they obey him?" Finally Jesus asks the question directly—Who do you say that I am? And as usual, it is Peter who comes up with the answer—You are the Messiah, the Son of God. Messiah, in Greek, you are the Christos. You are the Christ. What does that mean, the Christ? If you think about it, we still use a form of that word Christ—when we bring a child for baptism we often call it a christening, a Christening. Christ means annointed one, and when we baptize we still take a little oil and annoit the head with oil just as they did in ancient times when a new priest or a new king was put into office.

You are the Christ, Peter says. But what does he mean by that? Just like us, Peter thinks that Jesus wants what he wants. In those days they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. They may have had some different ideas, but there were some common themes about who this Christ was supposed to be. Most common was the idea that the Messiah would be strong, courageous, powerful and that abouve all he would deestory Israel's enemies and set the nation free from its oppressors. No doubt this is what Peter believed when he made his confession that Jesus was this Messiah, this Christ. That belief doesn't last long.

Because when Jesus tell him that the Messiah must suffer and die, Peter is shocked and he tries to tell Jesus that he's got the wrong idea. That's when Jesus, who is supposedly closer to Peter

than to any of the other twelve, says, "Get behind me, Satan." Don't tempt me! Don't try to talk me out of the road that I know I must take. You've got the wrong idea of the kind of Christ I am.

Biblical scholar Bruce Rigdon asks, Is it not the case that we stand in the same place with the disciples? Like them, we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, but we may be even more confused than they about what that actually means. We are surrounded by two thousand yeas of the church's very diverse expectations, claims and explanations bout who Jesus is and what he does as God's anointed one. He has been used as a sponsor for conquests, crusades, inquisitions, empires, revolutions, wars, and all sorts of causes, noble and demonic. So what can we teach our children about who Jesus is, and what it meas to follow him and to live as his disciples?

So often we try to make Jesus look like us instead of letting the Spirit make us like Christ. We try to get Jesus to bless what we want instead of asking what he wants. What kind of Christ will he be? What kind of disciples does he want us to be? What does it mean to follow a Christ like Jesus? Mark tells us as the conversation continues. Those who wish to follw Jesus must walk the way of the cross, which involves self-denial and giving one's life for others. Is Jesus also telling us that, like him, we must surrender thoughts of destroying our enemies and the pwoers that threaten us, since ultimately our worst enemy is violence itself? Jesus love is active and non-violent, even though he could have been the kind of Christ that Peter and the disciples wanted. But that's not who he was. That's not who he is. What about us? What kind of disciples are we? What kind of Christ do we want? Do we want a Jesus who protects us? Who values our way of life? Who destoys our enemies, who helps us win? Or will we follow this Christ, this Jesus, even though it leads to the cross?

Peter doesn't. He follows Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, through the difficult days of controversy, through the conflict with the authorities. He follows Jesus to the upper room and to

the Garden of Gethsemane. Then the soldiers come to arrest him and they take him away to be tried for blasphemy and sedition. And all the disciples run away. Except Peter. He still follows him, perhaps remembering this day when he told Jesus who he thought he was. We was ready to go with him. Or so he thought. Until the girl came up to him as the trial was going on and said to him, "Aren't you one of his followers?" And he said he wasn't. And she asked two more times and each time he denied it, just as Jesus said he would, "The cock will not crow today until you three times deny that you know me." And he went out and wept.

According to Paul, when Jesus arose on Easter morning he appeared first to the women and then to Peter and then to the twelve. We know about the appearance to the women and to the other disciples, but we don't know about this appearance to Peter. It's not referred to anywhere else in Scripture, there's no account of it, but its interesting to think about. I wonder what Jesus said to him? But their last conversation we know about from the gospel of John, where Jesus asks three times, Simon, son of John, do you love me. And Peter responds, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Three times, to make up for the other three times. And Peter follows him. Even years later, to his own cross outside the city of Rome. Perhaps finally realizing that to follow this Christ did not mean a victory over one's enemies but having the power to love one's enemies. For that is what will really change the world. I wonder if we will realize that too.