

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of hope bloom and grow... Amen.

It's hard to believe that this is the last weekend in August... Next weekend is Labor Day, followed by our Rally Sunday, and before we know it, fall will be officially here.

And with fall a lot of images come to mind... Fall harvests, cooler weather, changing leaves, back to school, all things apple and pumpkin, and of course... Football...

And as most of you know, this year the Packers are looking a little different...

Well, I guess they look a little different every year, with a new roster... But this year in particular, things are more stirred up, since they have a new starting quarter back...

And even people who do not follow football have probably heard of this change...

Because Green Bay had Aaron Rodgers for a long time... A man who I'm guessing has a ton of differing opinions this season than he did in years past...

Because his situation has changed and so to us, especially us Packer fans, he has changed...

But I'm guessing that most of us have changed too, especially since 2008, when Aaron Rodgers became the starting quarter back...

Because life, like seasons, is always changing... And what we need changes as well...

Which makes me wonder... Does Jesus change and evolve with us?

Or is it just our perceptions of who Jesus is that changes as we grow?

Because today Jesus sheds light on this very topic, by asking us...

Who do you say that I am?

A question that we do not get often, and something that most people don't often think about...

And I am right there with you... In fact, the last time I thought about this question was back in 2018 when I had to write an essay on it in Seminary...

Because as much as I dwell in Scripture and in prayer, I don't usually stop and think... Who is Jesus to me?

Which is interesting because most people tend to think about other people and what they mean to them... Whether it be a friend, family member, Aaron Rodgers, the president...

And I'm guessing it would be much easier to answer the question who are they to you...

And I'm also guessing it would be more comfortable to talk about other people than it would be to talk about Jesus...

Especially since most of us Lutherans, are not in your face Jesus people...

We tend to let our actions speak when we are out in public, and tone down the Jesus talk unless it is in church on Sundays...

And yet our Scripture from today pushes our comfort level, highlighting the importance of talking about Jesus with others in public...

As our gospel today does not take place in a church building...

Nor does it take place in the comfort of someone's home...

It takes place in Caesarea Philippi, which was a public place that was dedicated to the nature god Pan... Where Herod the Great had shrines built to the god Pan...

Herod, you may remember, was the governor who wanted Jesus killed as a baby...

And it is here that we find Jesus with his disciples, surrounded by shrines for other gods, in public with people wondering about... When Jesus asks... Who do you say that I am?

And Peter emboldened by the Holy Spirit says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

And what strikes me from this conversation... is not so much what Peter says, but instead what Jesus says...

First, Jesus refers to Peter as the son of Jonah...

And Jonah, as you may remember, did not listen to God... In fact, Jonah went the exact opposite way God asked, causing him to be swallowed by a fish and spat out in the right direction...

So, what does this mean? Could Jesus be directing us to not only the obvious question, who do you say that I am...

But through his response is Jesus also asking... who are you to Jesus?

Both are valid questions, and are something Jesus encourages us to ponder...

Who is Jesus to you? And who are you to Jesus?

But the good news is... We don't need to answer these questions alone...

As we have this community right here, a place that is safe to talk about hard questions, to reflect, to listen, to discern, and learn...

Where we come together, just as Jesus instructed today, as a church...

But a church, is so much more than us here...

As we are part of a rich and complex history of what it means to be church together...

Because we are never church alone...

As we profess in our Apostle's Creed... "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, and the communion of saints" ...

All things that are greater than us... Where through the Holy Spirit we form a community that transcends time and space and life and death...

Where we are all connected through the mystery of the cross and welcomed at Christ's table...

Because the foundation of our church is not located in a certain space... It is built on the rock of Christ...

A rock that holds space for all...

And if Christ can do that for us, then we can talk about Christ to others...

We can invite others to church... And we can look at new and different ways of what it means to be church together...

And we can always come together to hear the good news of Jesus, because with Jesus there is always good news...

Good news that is poured out at Christ's table...

Good news that helps us build the kingdom of heaven here on earth...

Good news that brings people together... Because together we reflect the diversity of God's love...

Together we can breathe life into a world that desperately needs some good news, and hope...

Hope that was first born in Christ... Our rock and our redeemer... Amen...