

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
August 27, 2017
Rev. Kevin M Smith
Matthew 16:13-20

Getting To Know You

A little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, was running as fast as she could, trying not to be late for Bible class. As she ran she prayed, "Dear Lord, please don't let me be late! Dear Lord, please don't let me be late!" As she was running and praying, she tripped on a curb and fell, getting her clothes dirty and tearing her dress. She got up, brushed herself off, and started running again. As she ran she once again began to pray, "Dear Lord, please don't let me be late... But please don't shove me either!" (Read more at <http://www.beliefnet.com/ilovejesus/features/hilarious-christian-jokes.aspx?p=9#kf4QRGcY1FTzLjkC.99>)

There are so many interpretations of who Jesus was and what Jesus does to us that it's a wonder we don't have Catholics and Baptists and Congregationalists claiming that each other is just spreading "fake news." And, what about all the other people in the world who do not claim to be followers of Jesus? So many ideas about the identity and even the veracity of one man who lived in a Roman-occupied land over two thousand years ago.

A kindergarten teacher was walking around her classroom while her students drew pictures. One little girl was scribbling so intently that the teacher asked what she was drawing. The little girl replied, "I'm drawing a picture of Jesus." The teacher said, "Oh honey, nobody really knows for sure what Jesus looked like." The little girl, without missing a beat, responded, "They will in a minute." (<http://www.charlesspecht.com/christian-jokes-and-other-funny-stories-that-will-make-you-smile/>)

We Christians think we have a pretty good idea who Jesus was, and from all the pictures we have seen of him we have his image in our minds. We have our Bible, our New Testament which has the Gospels who describe who Jesus was, right? Of course, the problem with that is each of the Gospels was written for a very different ancient Christian community and depicts just a little bit different story about Jesus. John's mystical and spiritual Jesus is pretty different than Mark's more flesh and blood Jesus who tells his disciples to keep it a secret that he is the Messiah. John not only claims a messianic nature of Jesus, but claims that Jesus is the actual true manifestation of God's word on earth—the "logos" of God.

Perhaps these early, ancient descriptions of Jesus, which vary in what they say Jesus did or said and when he did it or said it, are the reasons we have so many denominations today that claim they know Jesus much better than another church. And many of the non-denominational church claim they know him best and know exactly what you must believe in order to obtain his saving love.

In our story this morning from one of the Gospels, this one from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus finds out from his followers that some people think he is Elijah returned. Some think he is the resurrected John the Baptist. Others think Jesus is Jeremiah or one of the other

ancient Jewish prophets returned to life. Funny, isn't it, that there was no answer like "Jesus, you are the son of Mary and Joseph of Nazareth," or "you are a wood and stone tradesman who now has become a rabbi." Instead, people think this Jesus has to be someone other than who he is. Even in this gospel passage Jesus calls himself the "son of Man" which speaks of his humanity. Later on, though, when he asks Peter who he is Peter calls him the "Messiah, Son of the Living God." Jesus does not correct him. He only directs him to keep it a secret. A "messiah" was an anointed one, or better an "appointed one" to perform some specific duty. And Peter claims Jesus has this very special relationship with God—so close that he calls God the father of Jesus. These words of Peter's were pretty risky in those times; some say they would even be treasonous. You see, the other person who was known as a "son of god" in those times was Caesar. They even printed those words on Roman issued coins which bore the image of Caesar on them. "Son of God," risky words indeed.

I'll bet you if I went around this chapel this morning and asked each one of you to whisper in my ear who you say Jesus is I would get many different answers. Who do you say that Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus, Son of Man, Jesus, the Son of God, is to you?

So, really, let me ask you: How do you get to know someone?

We get to know people by spending time with them, right? We get to know people by talking to or with them, right? We get to know each other by thinking about each other, right? But how about historical figures? How do we get to know them? We read about them, of course. We can watch TV shows, documentaries, and movies about the right? We can take classes to learn more about them right? Lot's of way to get to know more about historical figures. But, it's hard to get to know what historical figures were really like as human beings. But we can extrapolate what they might have been like by reading histories, taking classes, talking to others about what they know about the historical person.

Still, my friends, what really matters is *who do you think Jesus is?* Who is Jesus to you? Is Jesus alive in your life? Is Jesus working in your world? Is Jesus present here this morning? Does Jesus know Maple Street Church? Does Maple Street Church know Jesus? What does it really mean to "follow" Jesus? What does it mean to say that you are a Christian?

I cannot answer these questions for you. Only you can do that. So, let me give you an assignment. Spend some time this week and seriously ask yourself, just like Jesus asked his disciples, who is Jesus for you?

So, who is Jesus to you?

Ask yourself: Do you want to get to know Jesus better?

How can you get to know Jesus better? If you want to get to know Jesus better how can you do it?

And ask yourself this: what would Jesus want this church to do? What would Jesus want all those people out there, who don't come to Maple Street Church, to know about us? Amen.

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