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Luke 9:18-27
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Who Do You Say That I Am?

I met my wife in the crawl space of a Habitat for Humanity project. I had just moved to Seattle after the Navy and joined an awesome church that had a vibrant young adults ministry. There were lots of great people in this group, but one person in particular caught my attention. Karen Scott.

But that was not who I was under the house with initially as we laid down a vapor barrier in the crawl space. It was another woman. We were working, talking, and having a grand ole time when Karen decided to come down and stir the pot a bit.

After almost a year of developing friendships in this group, I decided to go for broke and ask Karen out. It was a risk because once you let your cards known in a group like that, if things didn't go well, chances were high that you wouldn't play at that table any more. Get my drift.

Needless to say, I won Karen's favor and we had several more dates. We had gone from being casual acquaintances to being friends to eventually dating. But there came a moment when we needed to DTR. Define the relationship. In other words, we needed to decide who we would say that we were to each other? How we answered that question changed everything with respects to how we related to one another and others from that point forward.

In that moment after we DTRd, Karen was my "girlfriend," which meant that it was public knowledge that both of us were off the dating circuit. Then over time, we would become fiancés which meant that we were committed to be married to each other. Ten months later, we became husband and wife, till death do us part. A year later, she became the mother of our first child, and then eventually three more. And since then she has become my life partner, my companion, and my best friend.

It all began with that initial DTR. Defining the relationship. And everything since then grew out of how defined and continually redefine ourselves.

In our scripture today, Jesus DTRs with his disciples. They had been walking with him for sometime. Some of them making very costly decisions to leave everything behind, jobs, parents, families, and children. They had heard Jesus' teachings as if one who had authority and who knew God personally. They had watched him drive out evil spirits, how he healed many who were blind, sick, paralyzed, and even raised a widow's son back to life. And just before this story,

they were part of Jesus' miracle of feeding five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish.

It was then that Jesus decided to take them away to a private place, out of the chaos of ministry, and DTR, define their relationship. You see it would be very important of them to know how they saw Jesus and themselves before they could go any further.

If you have your bibles with you, please open them up to Luke 9:18-27 as we read this story for ourselves.

18 One day Jesus was praying alone. Only his disciples were with him. He asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

19 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Still others say that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

20 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

Jesus Speaks About His Coming Death

21 Jesus strongly warned them not to tell this to anyone. **22** He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things. The elders will not accept him. The chief priests and the teachers of the law will not accept him either. He must be killed and on the third day rise from the dead."

23 Then he said to all of them, "Whoever wants to follow me must say no to themselves. They must pick up their cross every day and follow me. **24** Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it. **25** What good is it if someone gains the whole world but loses or gives up their very self? **26** Suppose someone is ashamed of me and my words. The Son of Man will come in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. Then he will be ashamed of that person.

27 "What I'm about to tell you is true. Some who are standing here will not die before they see God's kingdom."

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning I want to do several things. One is consider who do people say Jesus is today? What was so significant about Jesus' question in the first place? Who did Peter say Jesus was? Who do we say that Jesus is and what are the implications for how we answer that question? And finally, I want to close with sharing personally who Jesus is to me.

So what do people about who Jesus is today?

Let's watch this short video and see for ourselves what people on the streets of New York City say about Jesus.

As we heard, some claim him to be someone they pray to.
Some claim him to be a friend. Others their Lord and Savior.
Jews claim that he was one of many prophets from God.
Muslims claim that he was a special messenger from God.
Hindus claim that he was a morally good man among many other “godlike” beings.

Buddhists claim that he was enlightened.

Atheists do not believe that God even exists, so Jesus must have been a lunatic.

And more and more young people today seem to be abandoning the idea that Jesus was God or that he would anything important to say about their lives.

So we see, in America, we are all across the board in our beliefs. I would bet that even here, we might have some variance in opinion.

But what was so significant about Jesus’ question anyway?

Notice that not just once, but twice, Jesus asked a similar and yet very different question. First he asked, "Who do the crowd say that I am?" And then he asked, “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

First he asked his friends to think theologically about what other people were saying. Just like in our video.

Some said he was a reincarnation of John the Baptist who called people to repentance with God.

Some said he was Elijah a prophet who was zealous for God and who never experienced death.

Some said he was one of the prophets from the Old Testament who had come back from the dead.

In answer to Jesus’ question, theologian and writer C.S. Lewis once said, “My aim is to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing people say about [Jesus], such as ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the sort of thing that we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God.”¹

So in essence, Lewis claimed that Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or Lord. That is what we must choose.

¹ C.S.Lewis as quoted in Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus is the Question, The 307 Questions Jesus asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2014), 103.

When the disciples shared what people were saying about Jesus notice how they fell back up on familiar concepts in order to frame a brand new thing that was happening. But also notice that no-one, not even the disciples, would flat out say that Jesus was the Messiah, God himself. Why was that?

As we look at the text, we see that twice Jesus made very specific proclamations about himself using the statement “I AM.”

People hearing this would have immediately thought of Moses encounter with God in Exodus and the burning bush when God called Moses to return to Egypt to free the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. When Moses challenged God asking who he should say sent him to them.

God said, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: “I AM has sent me to you.”²

By Jesus asking the questions “Who do people say that I AM?” and “Who do you say that I AM?” He was testing them indirectly, “Do people believe that I am God as God’s self?” “Do you believe that?”

However they answered that those questions could have gotten them stoned for blasphemy.

Peter was the first to answer. He just blurts out, without much thinking. In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter responds, “You are the Christ. The Son of the Living God.”

The Greek word that Peter used to describe Jesus was Christos. It means The Anointed One. Or in Hebrew, it means The Messiah, the one who would usher in God’s kingdom reign on earth. This was a DTR moment for Peter. It took a lot of courage for him to make that claim and publicly define his relationship with Jesus. And once that relationship was defined, it came with implications as to how Peter would relate to Jesus from then on out. Even still, Jesus said that Peter didn’t come up with that answer himself, but that God the Father in heaven revealed it to him.

Was Peter speaking for himself or did God put the words in his mouth? We don’t know for sure. But we can see what Jesus said about himself.

Repeatedly, Jesus called himself the Son of Man, which was another way of saying Son of God. Back then when you claimed someone as your father, there was little distinction between you and him. There was a oneness between them.

In John 5 when Jesus was healing a man on the Sabbath and questioned by the Pharisees. He claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath and called God his Father, making himself one with God.

In John 10, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.”³ No mincing those words!

² Exodus 3:14

³ John 10:30

In John 14, one of Jesus disciples, Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”⁴

In Mark 14, at the Sanhedrin trial of Jesus when the high priest asked Jesus: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus responded "I am".⁵ Again we hear those echos of Genesis. From all this, we can surmise that Jesus clearly claimed to be God.

But what does this mean for us and what are the implications of believing it?

Imagine a circle representing our sphere of belief. The circle is our world view and where Jesus fits in it or not. Inside the sphere is a throne representing who controls our world view.

The first world view is that of a carnal person. Jesus is outside their sphere. Maybe they think of him as a good moral teacher or a prophet who spoke for God. Or maybe none of the above. Maybe he was just another person like you and me. The carnal person sits on the throne of their lives, calling the shots, as best as they are able. But Jesus is no where in the sphere influencing the person’s thoughts or actions.

The second world view is that of a spiritual person. This person takes everything into consideration and is influenced by everything. But when it comes to making decisions for what they believe or how they act, they still call their own shots.

The third world view is that a carnal believer. This person is one who has accepted Jesus into their life which we see the cross within their sphere of their world view. But the person is still seated on the throne of their lives, calling all the shots.

The fourth world view is that of a disciple of Jesus. This person has not only accepted Jesus into their life, but has willingly stepped off the throne and has invited Jesus to be their Lord and Savior. Jesus becomes the one who calls the shots and we faithfully obey. We don’t become mindless puppets, but thoughtful disciples who adopt the mind of Christ and work in concert with God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I want to close with telling you a little about my faith story.

⁴ John 14:8-11

⁵ Mark 14:61

My formative years were spent in the Roman Catholic Church. It was there that I learned about Jesus, what it was like to be part of the Body of the Christ, and how important it was to find our place of service in the world. My parents were active in the church and in our community. I served as an altar boy at masses and was active in Sunday school classes. At this point, you could say I was a carnal believer.

During my teen years, as what often happens, families drift apart from the Church and my friends became more influential on my budding faith in Jesus. At fourteen, I accepted Jesus into my life when a friend asked me, who Jesus was to me and whether or not I knew that I was going to heaven when I died. I didn't know how to answer her and so decided to pray that Jesus would enter my heart. That's when I became a carnal believer.

To be honest, nothing major changed in my life at that point. But I was more spiritually aware and curious. Jesus was in my sphere, but he had yet become Lord of my life.

It wasn't until college where I grew in my knowledge of the bible and what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. I was in a bible study through The Navigators and my Navs leader would take me with him to a Presbyterian Church on Sundays. Do you know how quiet a college campus early on Sunday morning before church? People must have thought I lost my mind.

My Navy years immediately following college created the crucible where my faith was tested, refined, and solidified. More and more Jesus was becoming less a person I learned about and more my friend, who I talked with, walked with, and relied upon. It was then also when I invited Jesus to be Lord of my life. I got off the throne, and let him take the reign. He was calling the shots. He was directing me. He was molding me more and more into his image, and less and less of mine. That's when I became a disciple of Jesus.

And ever since, Jesus has walked beside me, showing me more and more what it means to be loved by God the Father, and guided by the Holy Spirit. There have been times when I have felt incredibly close, even divinely protected. And there have been times when I have felt utterly abandoned by God.

Still, even in those dark moments, I never questioned how Jesus has been with me all the way. I know that Jesus is with me. He is for me. And he will never abandon me.

That knowledge deep within my soul gives me confidence to know that I truly can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.⁶ And it helps me to love others in same what I want to be loved by them. Even my enemies.

⁶ Philippians 4:13

And when my life is over, I will know that I will stand before God the Father with Jesus by his side, and Jesus will say, “This is my boy. Well done good and faithful servant. Come enter into my rest.”

That is who Jesus is to me. He is my Lord. He is my Savior. He is my Comforter. He is my Counselor. He is my Confidant. He is the conduit through which I connect with God the Father. But most importantly he is my Friend.

In just a moment, we will have the privilege of baptizing Raynee Morgan Wallschlaeger. Raynee and her mom Tauschai have been coming to Cascades for a couple of months. And Raynee said that she wanted to be baptized into the Christian faith so that others would know that she belongs to Jesus and wants him to be Lord of her life. It’s the beginning of a journey.

This is her saying, “It’s time to DTR. Let’s define this relationship. I want people to know that I belong to the Jesus, and Jesus belongs to me.”

Let us pray.