

Mark 8:27-38  
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“Who am I?”

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Most of us have had to deal with Egotistical people at some point during our lives. So this week I happened across an article titled, “3 steps to Bring an Egomaniac Back to Earth.” The author uses the workplace as the setting to provide advice for leaders who find themselves working with egotistical people...

First, learn their personality, find out early if the person is coachable, find out how well this person takes constructive criticism, and so forth.

Second, open their eyes, if they are to be a successful team player, it may be up to you as the leader to help get their value and abilities back in alignment.

Finally, provide the shock. Create a situation that will not only open their eyes but something that won't soon be forgotten.

So, as we read the bible story today from the gospel of Mark, we hear about a lot of good things that have been happening in Jesus' ministry. He is getting his name in the headlines, and his face on billboards in the ancient world. His message is growing, and people are flocking to hear him speak.

We know he quickly found 12 people ready to immediately drop their whole lives to follow him. He is performing miracles right and left and the people he helps are showering him with praise and thanks. He is even saying the right things for a hero on his upward ascent... telling his disciples not to go bragging about all the work he is doing. Over time he starts to get noticed by the Jewish leaders who worry about what he is doing and begin reporting him to the Roman authorities. His name is making its way into all the ranks of the ancient world and he keeps drawing larger and larger crowds. He raises a friend from the dead. He feeds all the concert goers at Summerfest with a few fish and a couple loaves of bread. He even walks on water which no one else seems able to do.

Could all of this be going to Jesus' head as he gathers with his disciples in today's story? Is it possible he is thinking... Well, I may have been the child of a poor carpenter, born in a feed bin in the back shed, but look at me now. Come, tell me again good friends, who do people say that I am? How Important am I? What dignitaries are talking about me now? What new headlines have I captured?

When we study the full picture of Jesus' life, we quickly realize this question he asks, “Who Am I?” was not coming from our Savior's desire to gain fame, but from his desire to be properly understood as God's Messiah. While Jesus knew who he was, he wanted the disciples to provide a public poll of what others were saying about him, and he wanted to know what his

closest friends thought too, because he wanted to know if who he was, and how others see him, is consistent.

So, the disciples report the recent poll figures to Jesus, “27% say you are John the Baptist, 23% Elijah, 30% one of the prophets and 20% are undecided.” This is high praise to be compared to these ancient figures. But then Jesus asks a more direct and personal question, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter quickly responds, “You are The Messiah!”

This is important because back in Jesus day there were many different expectations about who this “anointed” one, born of God, would be.

The Jewish people living in their homeland which was under Roman occupation expected God’s anointed to be a Commander in Chief, arriving as a brave warrior who would use violence, if necessary, to overthrow the occupying forces and return their land to them. They understood this land had been given to them by God through Isaac, yet it was currently controlled by foreign powers.

The poor were looking for another kind of Messiah. They wanted a “Robin Hood” messiah who would redistribute wealth and power equally to all people.

The sick and hurt wanted a “Florence Nightingale” messiah. One who would come and heal and care for the ill and hurts until everyone was healthy and happy.

Each group was waiting for a messiah who would do what they needed done, without considering the challenges faced by others. But Jesus was born to be Savior of all.

It might be good to pause a moment and ask ourselves, what kind of messiah are we looking for? One who will come into our life and ease our demanding schedules, take away our troubles, remove our loneliness, carry away our cares? Do we want a Savior who will affirm us without challenging us to grow?

Like most stories in the bible this one has major tension. Peter has opened his mouth and like a young child eager to give the right answer in class, he answers Jesus’ question, “You are the messiah!” And hanging in the silence of that moment Peter is pleased with himself... we can envision the rest of disciples as they begin nodding their heads “Yes;” “Yes” Peter, that sounds right.

The silence hangs there until Jesus responds. He begins slowly, quietly explaining what it means to be Savior of all. God’s Messiah is not a job for the faint of heart. 1) the savior will undergo great suffering, 2) the savior will be rejected by powerful religious authorities, and it gets worse.

Peter cannot imagine how this is anything like a real, powerful Messiah. How can a Messiah like this have the triumphal power to restore the land to Israel? How will the person who

answers this job description be able to feed the poor, redistribute wealth, or heal the sick. These are jobs that take strength and power and a high position in society.

Then Jesus confuses the situation even more; “in order to do this the messiah must die and be raised in 3 days.”

Jesus is going to be the utterly, unexpected Messiah. The Surprise Savior. He will be the suffering servant who over turns all our ideas of what it means to be a Savior, and yet he will become the one who offers eternal salvation.

I began to see how the ego problem in this story does not belong to Jesus. The Egomaniac is Peter and the other disciples, and the egomaniacs are the many other groups of people in the ancient world who expected Jesus to be the savior they needed him to be without considering the needs of anyone else. And then, and this is the hard one, sometimes the egomaniacs are us; we who believe heaven on earth should be easy, or that Jesus should be what we need him to be, or that he should swoop in and fix all our problems immediately. Faith in Jesus does not make life easy, or clear, or problem free, Instead, Jesus-Savior, through his life, death and resurrection assures us that even if we die trying to make the world more like the kingdom of God, our death is not in vain and it is not the end... there is eternal life for us.

Gregory of Nazianus, the Archbishop of Constantinople and widely respected church theologian of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, once said, “That which Jesus had not assumed, he has not healed.” Jesus came to earth to bear the fullness of our human experience; to take upon himself the fullness of our human need in order to bring the fullness of humanity into communion with God.

When we gather to sing and pray, and hear the Word, we come not to worship a Mirage Messiah, or a Self-serving Savior -- We worship one who...

Sides with those who are suffering,  
Restores the refugees  
And stands in for those who are dying

I shared communion with one of our homebound members this week, Vernetta Wandel. And a beautiful, unexpected moment happened; as the sun was shining in her window and she took the bread, and then again when she drank the juice, she spoke words which remind us to center our lives in God, Completely unprovoked as she finished the wafer and juice she said, “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you...”

Amen.