



Introduction

Three weeks ago we heard Peter's confession of faith as told in John's gospel. This week we hear Mark's version, when Peter says, "You are the Messiah." In John, the stumbling block is Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh, given for the life of the world. In Mark too the scandal has to do with Jesus' words about his own coming death, and here Peter himself stumbles over Jesus' words. But Jesus is anointed (the meaning of messiah) in Mark only on the way to the cross (14:3); so we are anointed in baptism with the sign of the cross.

Confession and Forgiveness

In the name of the Father, and of the ✚ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone.

Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and one another.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,

so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

In the name of ✚ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen**

Opening Hymn ELW # 660/LBW # 377 (vs. 1, 3-5)

Lift High the Cross

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that for the sake of the gospel we may turn from the lure of evil, take up our cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

The image of the servant of the Lord is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus. Like Jesus, the servant does not strike back at his detractors but trusts in God's steadfast love.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Psalm 116:1-9

- ¹I love the LORD, who has heard my voice, and listened to my supplication,
²**for the LORD has given ear to me whenever I called.**
³The cords of death entangled me; the anguish of the grave came upon me;
I came to grief and sorrow.
⁴**Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray you, save my life."**
⁵Gracious is the LORD and righteous; our God is full of compassion.
⁶**The LORD watches over the innocent; I was brought low, and God saved me.**
⁷Turn again to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt well with you.
⁸**For you have rescued my life from death,
my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling;**
⁹I will walk in the presence of the LORD in the land of the living.

Second Reading: James 3:1-12

This text uses various images to illustrate how damaging and hurtful the way we speak to and about others can be. Not only are we to control our speech, but what we say and how we say it are to reflect our faith.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

This story provides the turning point in Mark's gospel. Peter is the first human being in the narrative to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but he cannot accept that as the Messiah Jesus will have to suffer. Moreover, Jesus issues a strong challenge to all by connecting discipleship and the cross.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

This week, I saw – not for the first time – a media bias chart. The graph shows which news sources are most reliable (placed near the top) and most questionable (placed near the bottom). It also arranges them from most liberally biased (on the left) through neutral, to most conservatively biased (on the right).

It is fascinating to study to see what news sources we trust personally and which are judged most trustworthy by others. (And yes, I'm sure there is some bias inherent in the chart itself.) I mention it today, not to tell you which news sources to read or listen to, but to see how that connects with today's gospel passage.

Jesus is with the disciples in the region Caesarea Philippi. It is not a familiar place from the Old Testament, settled by the people of Israel and given a Hebrew name. Instead, it is a politically charged place built by the occupying Roman government and named for one of their own leaders.

While there, Jesus asked the disciples two questions. The first is fairly easy, right? Who do people say that I am? The disciples can quote the current news sources, the local gossip, or even share their families' views.

The answers are wide-ranging, but traditionally Hebrew responses that the disciples have heard from others: John the Baptist (who was just recently executed by the current King Herod); Elijah (whose mysterious return has been expected for centuries), or one of the other prophets (the sometimes revered and sometimes ignored bearers of God's word for the people).

I can almost see Jesus nodding 'yes, I expected those answers – even though they are wrong' before he asks the disciples a much tougher question: "But who do you say that I am?" The you is plural, so we might hear it as "But who do y'all say that I am?"

Peter, often the first to answer Jesus' questions, answers for the whole group in a truth that has not come from any of the usual sources of gossip or news: "You are the Messiah." With that one word, he was declaring the disciples' conviction that Jesus was the long-awaited, Anointed One of God who had come to set the people free. To Peter's surprise, Jesus told them not to tell anyone the truth that they had learned.

The news may not yet have been broadcast, but the story has broken: Jesus is the Messiah!

But instead of sending the disciples out to share that news with everyone, Jesus begins to teach them what being the Messiah entails. Not a life of power and privilege. Nor a round of military victories to free the people of Israel from Roman oppression.

No, the Messiah would be rejected by the leaders of the synagogues and the temple and all the wise religious teachers; would suffer, be killed, and then rise again.

That must have sounded nonsensical to those men who had just come to understand who Jesus was. So Peter, again representing them, objects. And Jesus sternly puts him in his place. While the disciples had gradually learned who Jesus was, they were not yet able to accept what that really meant. They did not understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah.

Jesus never claimed that it would be easy. In fact, he declared just the opposite. For himself and for his followers. New Testament scholar Clifton Black describes it this way:

“In no Gospel does Jesus say, ‘It is my responsibility to die for you, while you applaud my heroism.’ Instead [he said]: ‘The Son of Man is ordained by God to suffer, die, and be raised. And so are his followers. Are you coming?’” (workingpreacher.org, 2021)

In this day and age, it is easy to blame others for the challenges and difficulties we face, but honestly, we should not be surprised that we suffer in this life. It has been that way for all of God’s people from the Old Testament through the last two thousand years. God has never promised that acting in faith would bring us ease or comfort.

Instead has promised to be with us in every trial, temptation, or torment and promised to bring us into the joy of eternal life.

In the meantime, we are called along with Jesus’ first disciples, to pick up our crosses and follow him. To love and serve God as we love and serve our neighbors each day. There are so many ways we can do that, but I admit that one in particular is on my mind today.

Regardless of which extreme of that media bias chart you lean toward, I urge you right now to consider that one of the most urgent needs in our community, our nation, and our world is to work together to end this surge of the Covid pandemic. To defeat the Delta variant before another more deadly variant emerges.

Picking up our cross to follow Jesus right now might mean relinquishing our individual privilege, choosing to pick up and put on a mask, and to extend our shoulder to get a vaccination – if not for our own protection, then for the sake of others. That is certainly one clear way we can demonstrate our love and care for our neighbors.

God will certainly always accept and bless all our sacrifices and struggles on behalf of others, because we know that each of them are also God’s beloved children. Amen.

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

Revealing God, you have made yourself known through bread and wine, water and word. Continue to nurture your church, that it is a place where your presence is experienced and shared. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creating God, you brought life into being and called it good. Bring new creation to lands devastated by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other disasters. Restore forests and curb overflowing waters. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Protecting God, you desire all people to live in peace and safety. Provide for all who are in danger. Strengthen first responders to help meet to the complex needs of others. Provide care and compassion as they face trauma themselves.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Transforming God, you announce release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed. Break chains of discrimination and injustice. Amplify voices that go unheard and inspire us to advocate for the those who are overlooked. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Forming God, you gather this community together. Shape our communal life, that in our prayer, praise, and worship, we honor you and encourage one another. Keep our disagreements civil and increase our joy in working together.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, grant healing to the sick and comfort to the grieving, especially those we name now. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Redeeming God, you accompany your people through every stage of life. We give you thanks for the saints who now rest in your embrace.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn ELW # 802/LBW # 487

Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.