Who Am I?

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When we think about people, we think about the characteristics that describe them. We used to play a party game where the name of someone famous was written on a headband that you wore on your forehead. You didn’t know the name written there. You walked around and asked questions and tried to guess who you were. Here is an example of that game.

I will read some characteristics of some Bible characters. You guess the person. 1. I was told by God to go and preach. I ran away. I caused a great storm on the sea. A giant fish swallowed me. Who am I -Jonah. 2. I was my father’s favorite son. My brothers hated me. My brothers sold me as slaves. I wore a coat of many colors. Who am I? -Joseph. 3. I was a friend of Jesus. I am a woman. Jesus appeared to me after he had died. Who am I/-Mary Magdalene 4. I cheated people out of their money. I was small. I might be found up a tree. I was a tax collector. Who am I? -Zacchaeus.

As human beings, our minds collect information and then put people and objects into categories. This is not good or bad its just the way our brain works. We get to know people and describe them based on their physical characteristics, personalities, and sometimes based on what they have done.

In today’s gospel reading, Jesus wants to know how the disciples see him. He wants to know how much they know about him. If I asked you right now to say one word that describes Jesus, what would you say? Teacher, prophet, healer, messiah…etc.

Yes, Jesus is all of these things. One way to understand Jesus is to ask who is he? I did this years ago. I looked at other great teachers in the Bible like Moses. I looked at great prophets like Isaiah. I looked at healers before Jesus like Elijah. I discovered that Jesus was the only one who fully had all the gifts of teaching, prophesy, and healing. Of course this is because Jesus is God with unlimited power.

Reading and comparing other bible characters to Jesus is helpful in understanding Jesus. But it wasn’t these comparisons that make Jesus the messiah. It’s how he lived his life. Jesus’s gifts of teaching, healing, and prophesizing made people pay attention to him. They watched him and listened. So now when we ask who Jesus is, we are asking *how* he lived his life.

How and what did Jesus teach? He used parables and his actions to teach. He was against empires and superpowers. Jesus encouraged people not to put their faith in money and perishable things. He modeled that by living close to the land and by using images from farmers, laborers and the natural world. Jesus was intimately connected with plants, animals, and nature. He spoke of sheep, sparrows, fig trees, and mustard plants. He spent time fishing, hiking mountains, resting on the beach, and walking through fields. We learn from Jesus what things in our life have the most value. We need to be very discerning because businesses, economists, and government leaders want us to buy “stuff.” They say its good for the economy but is it good for our soul? I am not talking about basic needs. I am talking about excess-when is it enough? Jesus knew that our relationship with goods and money could get us into trouble.

How and who did he heal? Jesus mostly healed those who were poor and outcasts. Those whom society stigmatized or forgot. He healed to make them whole. He saw and touched them. They were important. From Jesus we learn to “see” others.

What did he prophesize? Jesus prophesized that greed, power, and control would be our downfall. When we cling to things that do not last, we lose sight of what is right in front of us, and we fail to appreciate the gifts that God has given us for free. Gifts we do not have to work for: A beautiful sunrise, the songs of birds, a mountain vista, a smile from another. When we let go of control then God can surprise us with these gifts.

We learn from Jesus’s example. Jesus lived in and among people. He respected the land and only took what he needed. He loved and gave freely. He forgave all.

God incarnate-Jesus was sent to show us the way to save us from ourselves. To save us from looking in the wrong direction at the wrong things. Jesus knew that our focus could be easily diverted to the wrong things. And ultimately our focus affects our actions-how we live. Jesus wanted his first followers and he wants us, to see him and focus on him. Who is Jesus? He is many things but ultimately he is our savior.