

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)

Proper 16

Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

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

Have you been following the Olympics? What have you enjoyed most about them?

Are you ready for football season? Will KU stay at the top of the Big 12 north? Do you think K-State will be resurgent? Maybe some of you — perhaps only a few — think, or at least hope, that Nebraska will be back in winning form. What do you think?

For many of us it doesn't take much to get us talking. Mention sports, and we're quick to announce who we like, who we root for, what we think their prospects will be for the coming season.

Of course, not everyone is so into sports. Some really enjoy the theater, the opera, fine music, or a good book. So, what did you think of this year's Music Theater of Wichita season? Have you seen what's coming up with the Wichita Grand Opera? What are you most looking forward to?

Mention a subject we like, mention a subject that is important to us, and *we will respond*. Most of the time, we like to talk. We like to *share our enthusiasms*. We're eager to share what's important to us. We like to communicate our joys and aspirations, and even our disappointments (and if you're a Husker fan, or a Vikings fan, you've had plenty of disappointments in recent years).

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" And they respond to his question: "*Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*" It's a general question Jesus has asked. And it was no doubt not very difficult for the disciples to answer. People were saying various things about Jesus, and they could report them all.

But then, Jesus changes the question. After hearing their report about what *other* people were saying about him, Jesus asks, "*But who do you say that I am?*"

Now, the disciples have been following Jesus around. They have heard him preach and teach. They have seen him heal people and perform miracles. They have witnessed him casting out demons. They have observed him forgiving sins. And they have seen the opposition he has provoked. After all that, now Jesus asks them to make a confession of faith. Now Jesus asks *them* to *speak up* and declare who he is. "*Who do you say that I am?*"

In the English language, we don't distinguish between a singular and plural "you." Our pronoun "you" can mean one person, or it can mean many people. In

Greek though, there is a singular *and* a plural form. And here, when Jesus asks the question, he uses the plural form of “you.” He’s talking to *all* of his disciples. He says, “*Who do you — all of you — say that I am?*”

Jesus asks the question of *all* of them, but only one answers. Only Peter. St. Mark and St. Luke include this story in their Gospels as well, and in each case it is only Peter who answers. “*You are the Messiah,*” he says, “*the Christ — the Son of the living God.*”

Now maybe Peter answered so quickly and correctly, that the other disciples didn’t think there was any need to answer. Of course, it’s also possible that the other disciples *did* answer, but that the Gospel writers only record Peter’s answer. Or maybe, since Peter is the leader, the others allow him speak for all of them.

Whatever the case, it is worth noting, that Jesus asks *all of them* to respond. Jesus asks them *all* to give an answer to his question. Jesus asks them *all* to give a confession of faith.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we’re pretty quick to talk about things that are important to us — sports, music, movies, books, television, theater. How about Jesus? Can you talk about him? *Will* you talk about him? “*Who do you say that I am?*”

Now, to be sure, there are non-verbal ways of bearing witness to Jesus. How you act, how you live your life, is a crucial and vital testimony. People can tell a lot about what you believe by how you live. But, what you say is also important. And Jesus asks here, “*Who do you say that I am?*”

We need to confess Christ with our actions, to be sure. But our Lord also calls on us to confess him with words.

Speak up. “*Who do you say that I am?*”

Indeed, we know that’s what the disciples did. It may have only been Peter who spoke up here in today’s Gospel, but eventually they all did so. *All* the apostles bore witness to Jesus as the Messiah. All the apostles went out to preach the Gospel. In fact, all but John were martyred for their testimony to Jesus.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul writes:

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.*

(Rom 12:1)

Notice that when Paul writes about us responding to God’s love in Christ Jesus, he doesn’t speak of our response as only being of the heart or of the mind. No, St. Paul calls on us to present “*our bodies as a living sacrifice*” to God. Obviously, your body includes your mouth and your voice box. So offer up your mouth and your voice as part of your offering to God — that’s what Paul calls on us to do. Speak up. Don’t let your confession of Christ be silenced.

Professor Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse from Romans like this, he writes:

*Take your everyday, ordinary life —
your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life —
and place it before God as an offering.*

Your sleeping. Your eating. Your going to work. Your walking around. It's all to be offered up to God, in thanksgiving for all that he's done for you in Christ. How can you bear witness in those everyday times and occasions? What words has God *given you*, to confess Jesus as the Christ?

St. Paul continues in our Second Reading. We read:

*Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. . .*

I suspect one of the ways we are tempted to be conformed to the world, is to buy into the notion that any talk about Jesus will be “bullying” talk. We know there are plenty of ways of talking about Jesus that are not helpful. We know there are ways of confessing Christ that seem like a kind of verbal assault weapon.

But the alternative to that kind of unhelpful talk, is not mere silence. The faithful alternative, is speaking up, but doing so in a way that points to Christ and not to yourself. Doing so in a way that always drives ultimately, not to terror and fear, but to promise and redemption.

Likewise, to confess Jesus, is not to hold up your own accomplishment, or your own glorious transformation. No. To confess Jesus, is to point to the cross and what God has there accomplished for his entire creation.

God has done wonderful things for us. We have good news — the best news — to share. “*Who do you say that I am?*”

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