

Mark 8:27-30

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

By the time we get to chapter 8 in Mark, Jesus has recruited his disciples, faced stiff opposition, performed exorcisms, healed sick people, brought people back to life, demonstrated his power over nature, and taught many lessons. Up to this point the people aren't really clear as to who he is. His main focus has been on teaching **Mark 1:38** Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do (NRSV).

We know that his mission is one of salvation. Throughout his ministry Jesus stayed focused on his mission in spite of all of the distractions from the crowds, healing demands, and opposition. His biggest obstacle was the scribes and the Pharisees. The opposition to Jesus began early in his ministry. In chapter 2 after healing a paralytic he forgave sins and as a consequence he was accused of blasphemy. In chapter 7 the scribes and Pharisees challenged Jesus by accusing his disciples of not living by the tradition of elders. The real problem was that Jesus challenged their authority by violating their tradition. His accusers were authoritarian and forced their rules on others. Jesus identified the problem and addressed it in **Mark 7:7-8** "...teaching human precepts as doctrines. You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition" (NRSV).

Throughout his ministry the actions of Jesus have evoked questions of his identity. What is this? Who then is this? What is this wisdom? It is after the miraculous feeding of five thousand men that the Pharisees demand a sign. They were questioning his identity and looking for proof of his divine status. It is interesting to realize that the demons never question his identity; they recognize it immediately and responded instantly to his word.

Today's Scripture focuses on the identity of Jesus. While they were traveling north of Galilee, Jesus asked his disciples "Who do people say that I am?" There were several opinions: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Peter proclaimed "You are the Messiah." This is very important. It is a matter of understanding who Jesus really is. This is the first correct human statement of the identity of Jesus. The demons not only knew him but some even shouted out "Son of God." Peter has witnessed mighty works but they did not prove that Jesus was the Messiah. They only proved that Jesus was a mighty miracle worker. Jesus did not want to be known as a mighty miracle worker. Jesus is God's authoritative agent, the one that was prophesized about in the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus is the one they have been longing for and anticipating.

Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah. Then the problem becomes not one of what his identity is but what the people expect the Messiah to be. So, Jesus firmly commands that his disciples not tell anyone. Otherwise it will further complicate his ability to achieve his ultimate mission of going to the cross. The disciple understanding of the identity of Jesus is superior to the crowds but as of this point in the scriptures they still do

not understand that suffering is necessary for the Messiah. So, from now on he has to teach them that he must suffer and die.

When we look at Jerusalem and Passion Week, we see that there is a problem with mob mentality. Mobs believe what is popular at the moment, not what is correct. The mob believed that Jesus was the Messiah. However, they identified the Messiah based primarily on their wants. Their understanding of the Messiah was a glorious warrior and future king of Israel. So, they thought that Jesus would be a mighty warrior king. When they find out that he was not, then they turned on him. What God sent was not what they wanted. They wanted the Messiah that was a warrior king but they got the Messiah that is the Son of God.

The contemporary lesson for us is not to look at God and Jesus as a commodity that will give us what we want when we want it. We need to understand that suffering is not only a part of life but that it is the very heart of the identity of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Now whenever we suffer we can appeal to the suffering savior.