

Luke 9:1-24

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. Herod said, “John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he tried to see him.

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.”

He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

“The Most Important Question” based on
“Renegade Gospel” by Mike Slaughter
Luke 9:1-24 & Colossians 1:15-18
Lent 4, March 26, 2017 - Rev. Lisa Petty

For the season of Lent, we’ve been reading through a book “Renegade Gospel” by Mike Slaughter, who is helping us look at Jesus differently, or perhaps just shedding light on Jesus in a way we haven’t seen before, the rebel, the renegade and the revolutionary life.

We have looked at some of Jesus’ teachings and began questioning what we thought we knew. How did Jesus talk?, what did he say when he spoke? How are we called to follow in his footsteps still today?

And what does following Jesus actually mean for my day to day life.

Today we have this beautiful text of Jesus asking the question, “Who do you say that I am?”, but first he throws them the softball question, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

In Luke’s gospel, we have this question after Jesus has given the disciples the very power and authority that rests in him – to heal and cast out demons and sent them out. In Luke’s gospel, this question comes after he has taken them to Bethsaida and after the multiplying of the loaves and fishes.

So, the disciples have been around the crowds. They surely had heard others talking and know the answer to, “Who do the crowds say that I am.” And they answer, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.”

Now, I have no idea what Jesus must have been thinking, but all of those sound great! John and Elijah were good dudes, doing good work for God.

But then he asks, “And who do YOU, say that I am?” – He is asking these people who have literally been traveling in his dust for 6 months on the short end, a year on the long end. They have not only seen him perform miracles, but they have heard him speak, pray, teach, and they have been with him day in and day out.

By this point, if they did not know there was something different, or special, or miraculous about him, don’t you think they would have gone home by this point?

And Peter is the one to speak up and say, “You are the Messiah of God.”

Different translations say, “God’s Messiah”, “The Christ of God”, “The Messiah sent from God”.

Who do you say that I am? Who do you believe me to be? It’s the most important question we will answer in our life – and we will answer it with how we live.

We struggle to follow Jesus sometimes, we struggle to live in ways that are pleasing to God, and ways that are forgiving and loving to others.

Mike Slaughter says it well, when he writes, “Within our soft-secular churches, we claim to believe in God and profess Jesus but then act on the values of the secular culture. This explains why we struggle with the sacrifice required in following Jesus. Tithing is one example.”

We are a fairly healthy church with people of all ages, and when we have special mission funds, we see generosity and abundance. But we still struggle with the monthly concept of tithing to the church for wider and broader mission – trusting the church with our money.

Mike says, “If we are going to follow Jesus, recognizing Jesus as Messiah, we will have to radically realign our life priorities. Jesus brilliantly illustrated this in a parable found in Luke 14. Jesus describes a man, representing God, who is hosting a dinner and send out servants to invite guests.

One by one the excuses come back from the guests. One has just bought a farm and needs to examine his new land. A second has bought five teams of oxen and he needs to see if they are going to work out. A third claims that he has gotten married and is still on his honeymoon. Notice that the three used the same excuses we give when we choose to admire Jesus, but not really follow him:

Material property, our work, and our relationships. These are the three excuses we use most often for most everything – and we use the with Jesus too. What happened to following Jesus sacrificially?

Following Jesus isn't always what the cool kids are doing, and it's not always what we want to do, but Jesus reminds us time and again that following him is not easy, it's sacrifice and change of priorities.

It's not going out to eat or buying that thing I really want, knowing I haven't paid my tithe. It's saying yes to worship even when guests are in from out of town. It's helping the guy on the street even when the family is in the car or we have somewhere to be. It's forgiving the person who breaks your heart when they say they'd rather spend time somewhere else.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Is he just a nice guy who did some nice things? Or is this the messiah, the Christ, come to love and save the world, by his sacrificial life – dying and being raised to life?

Is he a guy who was like Elijah or the prophets who came to proclaim God's good news, or was he the man who in his life, death and resurrection showed us how to live sacrificially for God's world?

Is he a man who lived 2000 years ago who did some amazing things that we like to learn about today, or is he “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Who do you say that Jesus is? And how are you living out what you believe?

Your homework this week is to write your creed – what you believe.