

Who Is He? What Is The Meaning of This?
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels Palm Sunday 3.29.26

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-54
Psalm 31:9-16

I have two questions for you: Who is he? What is the meaning of this?

Those two questions echo throughout all of scripture, the early church, and reverberate into our souls to this day. Who is he? What is the meaning of this?

I'll start with the first one. Who is he? Let's look at scripture. Jesus is a fulfillment of the prophecy. The suffering servant. the one who although he did nothing wrong as Isaiah wrote about, "*He did not disobey. He did not run away. He offered his back to the floggers. He offered his cheeks to those who tore out his beard. He did not hide his face from insult and from spittle.*"

In the letter from the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi, Paul outlines the answer this way:

Who is he? He did not consider being equal with God as something to exploit.

He emptied himself by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.

Who is he? When he found himself in the form of a human, he humbled himself
becoming obedient to the point of death.

Even death on a cross.

Who is he? God highly honored him and gave him a name above all names.

So the name of Jesus, everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth
might bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Scripture teaches us He is a teacher and healer. There's a story, one of my favorites; Jesus was in a house of a very wealthy person. It was quite a large house but it was not big enough for the crowd. The religious leaders came in early. They sat up front. Everybody else filled in. His family, some of his followers, his brothers, sisters, they were still stuck outside. They couldn't even make it in. Imagine Mary, who was not young at the time, and waiting, standing outside, and there wasn't enough room for her to come in. And as Jesus is teaching (one of his favorite things to do is to teach) they heard people walking around on the roof. And I imagine the homeowner thinking, *um, today wasn't the day I was getting a new roof. What is going on up there?* Dust started to fall down. They started to hear pounding on the roof above. And Jesus knew what they were doing. And I think you do, too. There was a man who couldn't walk. His friends loved him so much they were bringing him to see Jesus. They're like, "We're trying to get him to Jesus to heal him." Jesus, sensing this, yelled through the rafters, "Your sins are forgiven. Leave this poor man's roof alone."

The religious leaders in front didn't say it out loud but they thought to themselves, "*Who is he? Who is he that he can forgive the sins of others?*" Jesus perceiving this looked at them and said, "I have a question for you. What's easier to say you're forgiven or to say get up and walk? They

didn't say anything, but he knew. He knew what they were thinking. It's probably easier to say you're forgiven than to say get up and walk. So Jesus shouted out, "Get up. Take your mat. Go home." And the man jumped up, gathered his mat, and off he went.

Who is he? This story is repeated in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Either it happened three times or they were all telling the same story because it was important to the Early Church. I think of it this way: they knew the house that now has a hole in the roof; they knew the man who couldn't walk and now he can. Since Jesus can do something that no one else has ever been able to do – to make someone walk with a command – then he must be able to do the first thing which is to forgive sins. The Church believes to this day that Jesus is who he says he is and that he can forgive. Who is he? He is a teacher, a healer, and the forgiver of sins.

In today's passion reading from Matthew, we hear that Jesus was to the point of death on the cross. In faith we believe he took the sins of humanity upon him. We believe he is the only one who lived without sin and yet it is he who took the sins of all of us past, present and future. He took those sins on him. Then, for the first time in his life, he felt disconnected from God because sin is a disconnecter. Sin will disconnect us from each other, from our true self, from God. It's the first time he'd ever, ever felt that way. And the words out of his mouth from Psalm 22, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" So who is he? Theologians in the Early Church called him the sin eater. The one who eats sin, consumes, the one who takes our sins away.

Who is he? He takes away your sin and mine, past present and future, he forgives sin and by forgiving he restores us in relationship to each other, to our true self and to God. He is healer – he can make the lame walk, the blind see; he makes those with hearts of stone find love in their heart for themselves and others.

Here is the second question: What is the meaning of this?

I believe that Jesus of Nazareth, if he was not crucified and if he was not risen, we would not know who he is today. Let that sink in for a moment. If not for the crucifixion and resurrection, we would not know of Jesus of Nazareth. So what is the meaning of this? The meaning is that we in the 21st century know the story. Movies and television shows are still being made about it. Just about every week I get asked if I've seen the show, *The Chosen*. (Not yet) We know who Jesus of Nazareth is today, we worship him today, because of the meaning of the cross and the resurrection.

What is the meaning of this? The meaning is that in the Roman Empire in the 1st century, crucifixion was a way of making people disappear. It's a way of making movements disappear. It's a way of taking cultural religion and languages and all sorts of humanity and making them all disappear. And they were really good at it. They would take one of the leaders; put the leader up on the cross and if you spoke his name, you go up next to him and then your family and then your friends until your culture and until your language until your humanity and your language and culture was gone. The Empire would take your body down because they own it. They put you in a hole because they own it. They put a rock against it so that nobody can get to it because the Roman Empire makes people disappear.

What is the meaning of this: some guy like me says without the crucifixion and the resurrection we wouldn't know who he is. I am convinced that if Jesus didn't do this, we might put him on a

list of notable speakers of the first century. There would be some line that would say he was trying to reform his own faith tradition by reminding us of Torah; by reminding us that we are to love God with all our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our mind and with all of our strength and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves; that we are to treat others as we want to be treated. Yeah, he would have a small footnote in the annals of history like this *he had a really nice idea and then he was erased*. But that's not what happened, is it? That's not what the meaning of this day is about.

“Truly, this man was God's son.” That phrase could end that centurion up on the cross. By saying those words, the movement didn't disappear. It became stronger and it started to move throughout history. 500 people saw Jesus. Many of them ate with him. They talked with him. And they told stories about the resurrected Christ. They told stories about what they saw. *We saw his arm. We touched his side. We ate with him. We have seen what has happened.*

Many of them ended up as martyrs themselves for their very testimony for the things that they saw. And the movement grew and grew and grew. There are many that are worried and saying, “Well, Christianity in the United States is declining and there's more people associated with none than with religion itself.” Okay, but we're not the world. If you look at what's happening in the world with this movement of Jesus Christ, he did not disappear. By best estimates, the church believes that 27,000 people per week are being baptized in China today. Even more are being baptized in India. The numbers in Bangladesh are hard to find, but they are gigantic. In the Middle East, this movement is growing and continues to make its beautiful way into the world. It is the way of giving and receiving the forgiveness of sins, it is the way of loving one another, finding a connection between us and God because He found himself in the form of a human and humbled Himself to the point of death.

In the 21st century, like in the 1st, this movement calls us humbly to ask ourselves, who is he? What is the meaning of this?

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