

August 23, 2026 — Sermon

Scripture Reading: Exodus 2:1–10

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13–20

“Who Do You Say That I Am?”

Last Tuesday, I bought a new all-wheel-drive car to prepare for Wisconsin's harsh winter. To be honest, I have heard so many warnings about Wisconsin winters that now I am kind of curious and even a little excited. I ended up buying a Hyundai because they are offering zero-percent APR right now, just for your information. After spending several hours at the dealership, I got to talk quite a bit with the salesman who was helping me. He was a white man, and at some point in our conversation, he suddenly told me that he had a Korean sister. At first, I didn't understand what he meant. Then he explained that when he was born, his parents wanted a daughter, so they began looking into adoption. In the 1970s, many Korean children were adopted by families in the United States, and many of them came to the Midwest, including Wisconsin and Minnesota. His parents adopted a Korean girl. He and his sister were born in the same year, and they grew up so close to each other that they still call themselves twins. Now they are both married and have their own families, but they are still very close. It was a short conversation, but it stayed with me.

What makes us who we are? Is it where we were born? Is it where we grew up? Is it the family that raised us?

We can ask a similar question when we look at Moses in the book of Exodus. Moses was born a Hebrew, but he could not safely remain with his parents because Pharaoh had ordered that every Hebrew boy be thrown into the Nile. His mother placed him in a basket and put it among the reeds along the riverbank. Pharaoh's daughter found the basket, saw the baby, and immediately recognized, “This must be one of the Hebrews' children.” Yet she saved him. And Moses eventually grew up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter in the Egyptian palace.

Probably many of you have seen the famous animated movie *The Prince of Egypt*. You all know it, right? One of its major themes is Moses' identity. And although the Bible does not tell us that Moses sat around every day asking himself these questions, it is not hard to imagine the tension in his life: Who am I? Am I Hebrew? Am I Egyptian? Where do I belong?

In fact, when the adult Moses goes out and sees the suffering of the Hebrews, the Bible calls them his own people. Moses knew his roots. But knowing where we come from and knowing what we are called to live for are not necessarily the same thing. Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and tried to intervene, but he responded with violence. He killed the Egyptian, and eventually he had to flee Egypt as a fugitive. Moses knew where he came from, but he did not yet know how to live out that identity.

Years later, in the wilderness, Moses encountered God. And notice how God introduced Godself: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses encountered the God of his ancestors. Through that encounter, Moses began to understand his own story and his calling in a new way. God called him to return to Egypt and lead Israel out of slavery. So in Moses' story, three questions become connected: Who is God? Who am I? What am I called to do?

And in today's Gospel, Jesus connects these same questions in a remarkable way, but he begins by reversing the question. Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi with his disciples and asked: Who do people say the Son of Man is? People had many answers—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

But Jesus did not stop there. He asked the disciples directly: "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." We are all familiar with this story and with Peter's answer.

But let me pause here and ask you a question. Do you know the difference between "Jesus" and "Christ"? We say "Jesus Christ" so often that it can almost sound as if Christ were Jesus' last name. But Jesus is his name, and Christ is his title. "Christ" comes from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning "the Anointed One." It corresponds to the Hebrew word "Messiah." So when Peter says "You are the Christ," he is making a confession of faith: "You are the Messiah, the one sent by God, the one we have been waiting for."

But there is something we need to remember. Peter's confession is important, but it is still Peter's confession. Simply repeating Peter's words does not automatically make them our confession. The faith we inherit from our parents, the tradition of the church, and Peter's confession are all important. We learn faith through those who came before us. But at some point, each of us has to stand before Christ on our own.

Jesus does not ask, "Do you know what Peter said about me?" Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Who am I to you? And after Peter answers, something very

interesting happens. Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ." And Jesus says to Peter, "You are Peter."

Once Peter confesses who Jesus is, Jesus tells Peter who he is and gives him a calling: "On this rock I will build my church."

It reminds us of Moses. Moses encountered God and discovered his calling. Peter confessed Christ and received a new understanding of who he was called to be. So perhaps the question we ask throughout our lives—"Who am I?"—is deeply connected with another question: "Who is God to me?" "Who is Christ to me?"

But neither Moses nor Peter was immediately ready to live out his calling. Moses resisted God's call. He asked, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"

Peter struggled in a different way. Soon after Peter's confession, Jesus told the disciples that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be killed. Peter refused to accept it. Perhaps Peter wanted a Messiah of victory without suffering.

And maybe that is true for us too. We may know who God is before we are ready to become who God calls us to be. We can believe and still hesitate. We can confess and still struggle. Neither Moses nor Peter was perfect, but both continued to learn what it meant to follow God and who they were called to become.

I started today's sermon with the story of the salesman and his Korean sister. Before I left, I asked whether his sister had ever been to Korea. He said no. Because of some health concerns, she probably will not be able to visit in the future. And then he said something very simple. For her, Minnesota is home. She was born in Korea, but Minnesota is where she grew up, where her family is, and where she has lived her life. Her story reminded me again that the question, "Who am I?", does not always have a simple answer.

Like Moses and Peter, we may spend a lifetime discovering who we are and what God is calling us to do. We continue to ask who we are, where we belong, and what we are called to do. My prayer is that each of our lives may be a journey of seeking our own answer to that question, "Who do you say that I am?"—of coming to know more deeply the God we trust and the Christ we follow. And as Moses and Peter discovered the direction of their lives through that encounter and confession, may we also discover who we are and what God is calling us to do.

Who do you say that I am? May we continue to seek our answer—and learn to live by it. Amen.

Let us pray. Gracious God, help us to know Christ more deeply, to discover who we are in him, and to follow where you call us. Give us courage to live out our confession with faith and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.