

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Who Do You Say I Am?****Lesson: Mark 8:27-38**

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”²⁹ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

“Who do you say I am?” This is the question Jesus asked His disciples.

While preparing for today's service, I had originally planned to preach on James 3, focusing on the power of words. However, as I revisited Mark 8, Jesus' question continued to resonate in my heart: "Who do you say I am?" "Who do you say I am, Hakki?" "Never mind what others say—who do **you** say that I am?"

It led me to reflect on how I think of God and when I most often seek Him. I realized that I tend to seek God more actively in times of worry and concern. Of course, I also thank Him during good times, but I find that I'm less intense and earnest in my prayers when things are going well. In difficult times, however, I call on God more urgently, seeing Him as my **comforter**, my **helper**, and the **rock** of my life.

One habit I struggle with is thinking about the worst-case scenarios in any given situation. I imagine the worst possible outcomes, almost as a defense mechanism, so that I'm not caught off guard if those outcomes happen. It's like bracing myself for the blow in advance.

If I feel I have some control over the situation, my worries lessen. But sometimes, when anxiety spirals and grows, it's because I feel completely powerless to influence the outcome. It's like being thrown into the deep waters of a sea or lake, flailing around with no way out.

In those moments of deep worry, I find myself reaching out to God, asking Him to pull me out and to anchor me in His peace.

"Who do you say I am?" This is a question not only for me, but for all of us. Our faith journey is personal. No one can answer this question on our behalf. It requires us to reflect on our experiences and answer Jesus' question for ourselves. It may be a short question, but the answer might not be so short. You might even find it difficult to answer at first. If that's the case, see it as an invitation—an invitation to reflect on your life and on how God has been at work in your story.

Jesus first asked His disciples, "Who do people say I am?" And they responded, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still

others, one of the prophets.” It was easy for the disciples to tell Jesus what others thought, because they were simply relaying someone else’s answer. They didn’t have to take responsibility for those words.

But then Jesus asked them again: “Who do **you** say I am?”

Just as it may be difficult for us to answer this question, the disciples also found it hard to respond. They hesitated—except for Peter, who boldly declared, “You are the Messiah.”

I believe Peter’s response was genuine. It was an honest reflection of his experience of walking with Jesus. Though, not long after, Jesus would rebuke Peter and call him “Satan,” at that moment, Peter’s words expressed his true faith in Jesus.

Peter was a fisherman by trade. After being called by Jesus, he witnessed firsthand many miracles and teachings. He saw hopeless people find hope, the lame walk, the blind see, and the mute speak. Peter believed that with Jesus, anything was possible. That’s why he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah.

However, Jesus then said something Peter couldn’t understand—He foretold His suffering, rejection, and death. Although Jesus also mentioned His resurrection on the third day, the shock of His coming death was too much for Peter to process, and he didn’t hear the rest.

So, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. When I first read this passage, I thought Peter couldn’t accept Jesus’ suffering because he believed in Jesus’ divine power. I still think that’s true, but I also now wonder if Peter, after spending years with Jesus, had grown deeply attached to Him. Perhaps his rebuke was a way of defending himself from the pain of loss.

But Jesus **had** to suffer and die. It was a central part of His mission, and His death was part of God’s greater plan. We often struggle to understand why bad things happen to good people, and we may turn to

the book of Job for answers. But Jesus was the most righteous person to ever walk the earth, and yet He suffered the most unjust death.

Jesus, the holiest person, was abandoned and left to die in isolation. He died naked on a cross, utterly alone. How lonely and forsaken must He have felt?

The pain and sorrow of Jesus' death are immense, but they also reveal that Jesus fully understands our own pain and suffering. He didn't avoid death; He accepted it as part of His mission, knowing that death was not the end but the beginning of something greater—resurrection and new life.

There is a Latin phrase, *Memento Mori*, which means “Remember you must die.” None of us can deny this reality. While we don't know the exact time of our death, we do know that it is inevitable. Death is a part of our story.

For families left behind after the loss of a loved one, death brings deep sorrow. Some of us, like Peter, may resist and struggle to accept death. But what Jesus showed and promised us is that death is not the end. In fact, it's a transition to new life—a gateway to a new dimension of existence.

As we approach death, we gain clarity about what truly matters in our finite lives, and we focus more on what is important. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. We make many choices in life, but the choice to find new life in Christ is the one that matters most. That choice begins with how we understand and relate to God.

Friends, Jesus is asking each of us today: “Who do you say I am?” I encourage you to reflect on who Jesus is to you this week. Consider how He has been at work in your life, and prepare an answer rooted in your own experience of faith.