



passing the crumbs



<Read Matthew 16:13-20>

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.



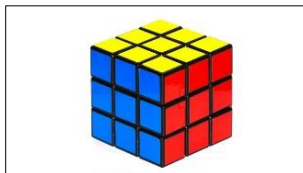
Over the last few weeks we’ve been talking about how our views of faith are often limited and we put ourselves and Jesus in a box, but he keeps breaking out and meeting us in unexpected ways expanding our boxes. Just when we think we have grasped what God wants us to grasp, we find ourselves changing again. The more we experience, the more **perspectives** we have.



I love this picture of a man’s face.¹ Take a quick look. Can see the side of the man’s face? Or are you seeing a man facing forward? We are all looking at the same thing, and yet we have two different opinion/perspective as to what we are seeing. Perhaps you are seeing both? Sometimes we have to live with paradox.



It reminds me of this advertisement about child abuse.² It is designed that someone at a child’s height can read information that cannot be seen from an adult’s height. An adult sees one thing (left) and a child sees something different (right). The child can see a bruised face with a cut lip and text that says “if somebody hurts you, phone us and we’ll help you” and it gives a phone number. The changed perspective gives a different vision.



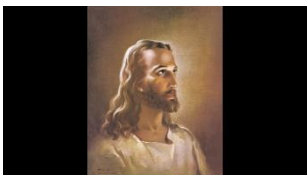
There are many sides to all of us. There are many ways for others to look at us. No two people would describe a person the same way.

¹ <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/57983913926991198>

² <http://gizmodo.com/this-ad-has-a-secret-anti-abuse-message-that-only-kids-493108460>.

It saddens me sometimes at funerals when there is a time of sharing stories about the deceased and I hear something about the person's life and I think "Oh, I wish I had known that side of them." But in amongst the stories there are often some characteristics that carry over and are seen by everyone regardless of your relationship with the person. Perhaps a sense of humor, or a talent (maybe music or cooking), or a willingness to go the extra mile, or of always being ready to help and metaphorically giving you the shirt off their back. How will people remember us?

So how did people think of Jesus? Who was Jesus? I grew up in the church. The first views of Jesus that I remember now were received as I sat on the small brightly painted chairs neatly arranged in 2 rows in the Sunday School room with my teacher Miss Marshman and her assistant who sat at the piano. And Jesus picture was on the wall. Do you remember the one? Fair skinned. Long hair. Kind looking. Smiling. Meek and mild. We had another one of Jesus with the children gathered round him. I was taught that Jesus was **kind and gentle and loved children.**



As we were told Bible stories week after week people told me Jesus was a **story-teller**, a miracle-maker, a healer, a teacher, a shepherd. *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus* was my favorite hymn. Jesus rode into town on a donkey on Palm Sunday and was arrested, tried and crucified, and then rose again so that my sins could be forgiven. I didn't like the bit about his death, but I loved Easter morning. We would go to church early for breakfast, and the service was always triumphant. But Jesus was just **whatever other people told me.**



Then came my teenage years. We went to see *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the musical on stage. I saw an angry Jesus there. He seemed exciting and came to life. And then through those teenage years I gradually discovered that I could have a relationship with Jesus. My faith became personal. Jesus became my **friend** and could walk with me when things were tough.



And so my faith adventure began, but Jesus didn't stay static. My perspective was constantly evolving: Jesus became "unfathomable, deep, and ungraspable, and yet oddly close, intimate, talkative, and relentlessly relational."³

When I became a parent, Jesus became my **teacher** and growing to be like him and taking on his values of love and compassion became important in raising my kids. And grace and forgiveness took on new meanings.

As a seminary student and then a minister, I have met people from so many different cultures and my viewpoints have been challenged, and Jesus became a **prophet** to me and we fought and wrestled and I began to understand what social justice is all about. And it was no longer just about Jesus as my personal savior, but about Jesus as **Liberator**, showing us the way of life that brings about redemption and salvation for the world.



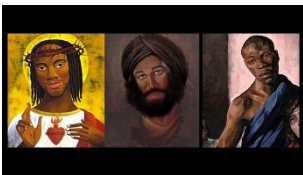
Jesus asks the disciples. **Who do people say that I am?** The gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each give us a different portrait or **perspective**. Yet we have a tendency to mush them altogether. Mark says that God's spirit descended on Jesus when he was baptized, Matthew has a birth story with magi, and Luke with shepherds. John says that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was God." And we are

³ William H. Willimon, *Why Jesus?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), ix.

left to **harmonize or live with the paradox**. Theologians interpreting the gospels, tell us that Jesus was **fully divine and fully human**.

We see the human side of Jesus. He has to resist temptation. He socializes at a wedding. He has his mind changed by a Gentile woman after he called her a dog (*the story we heard last week*). He gets angry at the moneychangers swindling people. He weeps when Lazarus dies. He gets tired and goes away on his own. He pleads with God to find a way other than crucifixion. If he was just fully divine and not fully human then these events would not mean as much to us.

And we see the divine side. Jesus as Savior. As the Son of God. As Lord. As Sovereign. As Messiah coming to usher in a new Kingdom. We see Jesus offering forgiveness and reconciliation. A Jesus who puts us back in right relationship with God. Jesus who does what seems impossible through the power and grace of God. If Jesus was just human, then we lose God and think we can do it all on our own.



It would be nice if I could just stop there. But Jesus suddenly started to become **not so safe**. And I like the way that theologians and artists from other countries help to point the cross-cultural piece to us. *Look at some of this artwork portraying Jesus in a different way.*



Jesus makes demands on us. He challenges our lifestyle. He says follow me. Jesus is continually on the move travelling from place to place. If we want to know him, then we have to meet him on the road. He constantly inviting us to join him, and then he sends us away. *Go! Make Disciples!* says Jesus. He doesn't let us settle into comfortable life. He constantly upsets our perspectives. Jesus doesn't fit in a static box and he is bigger than our ability to fully hold onto him.

And Jesus is a **peacemaker**. Although his peace often began as disruption as he made a subversive nuisance of himself. Yet he refused violence. He said, if someone slaps you on the right cheek offer the left. Roman asks to carry a backpack one mile, then go two. Pray for your enemies. Bless those who persecute you. He commends nonviolence, non-retaliation and forgiveness. And ultimately he lived it out, by just hanging there, as he was crucified.

And then Jesus has **compassion** on all. He reaches out to those on the margins of society. To the leper, to the blind, to the tax collector, and extends the definition of neighbor. He brings **liberation**, a way-out, setting the captives free.

But it is still not enough to hear what others say. **Who do you say that I am**, asks Jesus? Today as well as couching my answer in traditional terms that that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, I would answer **Jesus is the heart of God**. Jesus reveals God's character and what God is passionate about. He is the Word of God in a person. When I look at Jesus, I see God. Tomorrow, I might explain things in a different way, because Jesus never stays in the box I want to contain him in, and there's always some other perspective. And sometimes that perspective is a **paradox** too.



But what about you? Who do you say that he is? Are you willing to attempt an answer? Does it matter? I think it does, because our actions come out of our beliefs. If Jesus is meek and mild, then that is who we become. If Jesus was radical, ushering in a new kingdom, advocating non-violent peace-ways, not settling for the status-quo, on the side of the poor and oppressed, and one who reveals the passions of God, then that

shapes who we are called to be in Ipswich. **It matters because no one who meets Jesus stays the same.**



After Peter's confession, Jesus said he was building the church on Peter, **and so we are now that church.** We are here because we are followers of Christ, called and sent by him. We are here trying to figure out together, who Jesus is, so that we can be the church right here in Suffolk on a **risky, exciting, exhilarating, transformational journey.**

As we risk looking at the box in other ways, from some changing perspectives, we will travel together, and Jesus will be with us.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Resources

Willimon, William H. *Why Jesus?* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.

Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Series Description

We try to box God in, but God is always breaking out of the box and shattering our understandings of life in God's kingdom.