

**+ Matthew 16:13-20 + It's Time for a Quiz! + Series: What Does This Mean? +  
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +  
+ 14th Sunday after Pentecost: Back to School Sunday + 10 September 2017**

They are two of the most dreaded words in the English language. These two words are capable of deflating egos, creating uncertainty, and ruining a good day at school. No matter the age of the students or how much they love their teacher, these two dreaded words almost always draw out an audible groan. Perhaps you'll groan or even feel a tightening in your stomach when you hear those two words. What are the two dreaded words? Pop quiz.

What is it about a "pop quiz" that's so nerve-wracking? Well, a pop quiz is so dreaded because it's a test that comes without any warning. You're either prepared for it or not. You either know the material from class or you don't. Yet most teachers who hand out pop quizzes aren't doing it to be mean or because they like to watch their students squirm.

Typically a teacher's reasons for handing out a pop quiz are more educational, although their students might disagree. That teacher wants to find out what, if anything, their students have learned. Are they just repeating facts in class and on the scheduled quizzes or have they actually learned something? Has some of the mud thrown at the wall actually stuck to the wall? That's why teachers occasionally hand out pop quizzes.

Being Back to School Sunday, it's only fitting that we get to sit at the feet of our Master Teacher Jesus to learn from his Word. Yet this morning is a little different. There aren't many times when Jesus hands out pop quizzes to his students—the disciples, but when he does, he always has a plan behind it. Well, this morning Jesus has a quiz to test them if we and they have grown in wisdom.

Jesus was just starting his third and final year of public ministry. He was still very popular among the crowds, but opposition was starting to increase. The Jewish religious leaders had recently sent some of their own all the way up from Jerusalem to confront and question. His enemies scrutinized his message and ministry looking for any opportunity to trap him.

So Jesus took his disciples and went north, the farthest north he ever traveled during his ministry, to the city of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was a Gentile city well-known for its pagan worship. At the base of Israel's tallest mountain, the city was built around an enormous, sheer rock wall that rose over 100 feet in height and stretched 500 feet across. In that giant rock wall was a large cave from which the headwaters of the Jordan River flowed. Pagans viewed that cave as a home for the gods. Shrines, temples, and altars were built in and along that rock wall to all kinds of gods. It was the last place you would expect to find a self-respecting, God-fearing Jew.

So why would Jesus take his disciples there? Yes, he was getting away from the constant opposition of his enemies, but he also wanted to teach his disciples and find out what they had learned. Jesus' disciples had been following him for two years now. From the get go, they had believed that he was God's chosen Savior—the Messiah, the Christ, but had they grown in God's wisdom? Had they grown in understanding Christ and his Word? Jesus wanted to give them the opportunity to demonstrate that wisdom, so he brought them to that giant rock "pagan shopping mall" at Caesarea Philippi.

Sometime after they got there, Jesus dropped his pop quiz on them. It was quite simple actually—two questions that his disciples should have no problem answering if they had paid attention to Jesus and the crowds.

**"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** What were the crowds saying about Jesus? What had his disciples been hearing? What were they saying about **"the Son of Man"**—a name Jesus often used to describe himself? That was actually an easy question to answer. The disciples had been listening, and the crowds had some pretty impressive things to say about Jesus. **"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."** Those answers made up an impressive list—two prophets who had a connection to the Old Testament promises of God's chosen Savior, as well as faithful prophets who had suffered and been abused for teaching the truth of God's Word.

Those answers came from pious, respectful people, but there was something missing. Not a single crowd-sourced answer identified Jesus for who he really was. Those responses from the crowds made up an impressive list, but it wasn't impressive enough. In spite of Jesus' miracles, in spite of his preaching with God's authority, none of those Jewish folks in the crowd were willing to make the big leap and identify Jesus for who he really was. Was he not glorious enough to be the Messiah? Was he just another great prophet?

The disciples had answered well the easy question on Jesus' pop quiz, but now it was time for the big question—the tough one whose answer either opened or closed heaven to them. ***“But what about you? ...Who do you say I am?”*** How would the disciples answer that question? The Jewish crowds fell short in their answers. The disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but did they really know? Jesus would send those very disciples out to cities like Caesarea Philippi filled with people who worshiped false, dead gods. How would the disciples answer that tough question when the culture pushed back, when they were threatened by Jews and Gentiles alike? Would they go along with the crowds and either diminish Jesus or deny him? Peter, who was something of a spokesman for the disciples, immediately spoke up on their behalf. ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

What an answer! Peter gave an A+ answer to life's biggest question! “You, Jesus of Nazareth, are not just an impressive prophet, but God's chosen Savior long-promised since our first parents fell into sin. You are the living Son of God who gives us life, unlike all these dead idols.” Peter's answer defied Jewish culture by identifying Jesus as not just the Messiah, but as God himself. Peter's answer defied Gentile culture by identifying Jesus as THE living God unlike all of their false dead gods. Peter's answer demonstrated that he and the others had definitely grown in God's wisdom.

Not surprisingly, the Master Teacher commended his student for his answer. ***“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter (which means Rocky), and on this rock (that is, this confession of faith you have made) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”*** This wisdom that Jesus commended certainly did not come from human philosophy or wisdom. It didn't come from the knowledge we get from nature and conscience that tells us there's an all-powerful, all-knowing, holy god out there with no idea about the true God. That natural knowledge only produced all those idols in Caesarea Philippi. No, it came from God and his Word alone. That godly wisdom came from following Jesus.

On the everlasting rock of that beautiful confession of faith in Christ, the living God, Jesus would build his church—soul by soul as living stones built on the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of God's Word. Through Peter and those disciples and countless believers after them, Jesus would send out his gospel—that life-giving news of forgiveness of guilt through our living Savior-God. He would rescue soul after soul headed for an eternity in the depths of hell. Not even the gates of hell would be able to prevent him from rescuing those souls. With his forgiveness, he rescued those disciples and would rescue generations of other people all around the world, even us here today.

So here we are. Some of us have followed Jesus since infancy. For others it's only been a few years, but Jesus has a pop quiz for us too with the same two questions that he posed to his disciples.

***“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*** You ask around and people will tell you he was a great moral teacher or a great moral example. Others, like Muslims, will tell you that he was a prophet. Still others look at Jesus as a nice, harmless grandpa who gives you everything you want if you just believe enough or pray hard enough. People want a Jesus who will clean up after them, a nice Jesus who never allows evil or suffering or hardship or pain into your life. They want a harmless Jesus, but not the Jesus of the Bible. They don't want a Jesus who tells them what to do or why they need to trust in him if they want to live or why they need to depend only on him and not themselves. Basically, they want their own god. They want to be spiritual, but not religious.

That's the cultural air we breathe everyday, which is why the next question is so tough. ***“What about you? ...Who do you say I am?”*** How will you respond? Among God's people, it's easy to answer with Peter, ***“you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** But what about when you go home or go to work or school? When you spend time with your friends or your significant other? When you go online? How will you respond? Will you give an answer that's just “spiritual, but not religious” or will you stand up with Peter? ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

That's a difficult response to make. That's difficult because it flies in the face of our culture around us. You defy culture when you claim there is only one right way to forgiveness, only one right way to God and to being right with God, only one right way to heaven. So where will you find the wisdom and the courage to give that A+ answer when test times comes?

We heard the answer to that question earlier, ***“...From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** (2 Timothy 3:15) Where do you get that wisdom and that courage? Where does the A+ answer come from? You get it from the pages of God's Word. You want to grow in God's wisdom? Spend time with Jesus in his Word and grow like a tree planted by streams

of water. You want to grow in understanding, so you can be confident, even bold when test time comes? Spend time with Jesus in his Word and find his forgiveness, his peace, his strength, his righteousness, his purpose for your life.

That's the primary reason why Martin Luther cared so much about Christian education. He encouraged rulers and parents to give boys and girls a solid education so they could learn how to read and communicate. Why? Well, a good education can produce godly citizens, but more importantly, they would be able to read and study the Word of God. They could understand the words as God himself made them wise like Peter through faith in Christ.

That's why we care so much about Christian education. Time in the Word at home and at church, with God's people and alone, helps you grow in wisdom. Time in the Word at home and at church, with God's people and alone, helps you grow in faith and confidence. So when test time comes, you already know the rock-solid answer to Jesus' pop quiz. ***"Who do you say I am?"*** By faith, we answer, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Amen.