

# What type of Messiah you are hoping for?

Year B RCL, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lent

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Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 Ecclesiasticus 15: 11-20

Psalm 22:22-301 Corinthians 3: 1-9

Romans 4:13-25 Mathew 5: 21-24, 27-30, 33-37

**Mark 8:31-38**

Let us pray. May my words and the thoughts of all our hearts be to your glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You know, I love the stories which include Peter. Peter is always first to be there, willing to dive in. He is also the one most likely to say the totally wrong thing. Have you ever done that? Jumped in a little too fast, usually with great intentions, but potentially disastrous results? Sometimes we haven't understood the situation well enough before we start talking. And that is exactly what Peter does in today's Gospel.

Before I go too far down this road, we should remember that Peter was almost certainly Mark's source when Mark wrote his Gospel. So, Peter didn't mind sharing stories of his own mistakes. Peter is also the one in Chapter 16 of Mathew of whom Christ says, you shall be the rock upon which I will build my Church. Despite everything that Peter messes up, he is the foundation of that new Israel, the future church. That should give us some reassurance as we navigate life sometimes successfully, but quite often unsuccessfully, too. God loves us and calls us, warts and all.

The Gospel this week is part of a longer narrative that starts with Jesus and the disciples in Caesarea Phillipi. Caesarea Phillipi was an interesting place. It was in a region ruled by Phillip, outside of Galilee and Herod's territory. It had a gleaming white temple dedicated to the deity of Caesar. It was closely associated with the worship of Baal, and there was even a cave that was held to be the birthplace of Pan, the Greek god of nature. The hills were held to be the source of the River Jordan. Today, we would recognize the area as the Golan Heights.

The theologian William Barclay says: Against a background of all religions and all history, Jesus asks the disciples the question: "Who do you say that I am?"

It is only Peter who has the gumption and the insight to charge right in and say: “You are the Christ,” that is, the anointed one.

And that in a nut shell, takes us to where we start this week’s Gospel.

**Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**

Peter, the only person to jump up and say: “You are the Christ” also has his own ideas of who that Christ should be. Peter was raised in the tradition of a Christ who was a royal descendant of David, strong enough to rebuke the Roman invaders and to lead Israel forward to national success. Even after following this Jesus for some time, he still does not begin to really grasp the depth and height of Jesus true nature.

It is likely that Peter wants Jesus to be conformed to the world, to lead the captive nation of Israel bank to human glory. Suffering and dying isn’t part of that journey.

Today’s Gospel continues: **But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”**

Who do you say Jesus is? What do we understand about the very nature of Jesus? What do we understand when we say “I am a Christian?” Can we be Christian and not follow the commandment to “love our neighbor as ourselves?” How are we called to live out the faith we proclaim?

**He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

What does taking up their cross mean? It is not a passive burden of silently carrying the cross. Rather, it is an active decision to walk the path that Jesus walked, to heal the sick, feed the hungry, fight against oppression, care for the homeless and to seek God in everything we do. We do not each walk exactly the same path. We are called to different journeys and tasks. But we are each called to follow the way of love, the way of Christ.

Amen.