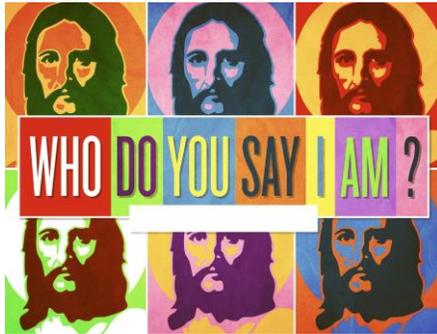


September 12, 2021 -
10:00 am
16th Sunday after
Pentecost



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
397-6323

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain
Organist - Sharon Banjavcic
Liturgy - Rev. Lavon Bayler

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Happy are those who find delight in God's law.

MANY: God is always nearer than our next breath. We gather to become more aware of that presence.

Knowledge of God is a delight to the righteous. They seek to grow in wisdom and understanding.

There is always more to discover than we know. God is our teacher and helper and judge.

Put your trust in God as you prepare to serve. Learn to be peaceable, gentle, and merciful.

We seek to do good and not harm all our days. We would open our hands to the poor and needy.

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

God of all wisdom, renew our sense of awe and wonder as we gather before you, the Source of all knowledge. Make your Word known to us, and stretch out your hand to touch us. Draw us away from our own devices that we may truly listen to the witness of all creation speaking of wonders we have ignored. Give us eyes to see beauty in all around us. Align us with truth and righteousness. Quiet our scoffing and awaken our trust. Show us the disciplines

we need to stay in touch with you each day. Amen.

***GLORIA: NCH 759**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 8:27-38**

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

²⁸ They told him, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets.”

²⁹ He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

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

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.”³² He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him.³³ Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

³⁴ After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to

themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.³⁵ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.³⁶ Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?³⁷ What will people give in exchange for their lives?³⁸ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

SERMON: “Who do you say that I am?”

“Who do you say that I am?” Is a much harder question than we think it is, and it’s already hard enough.

As we read from the New Testament every Sunday, we discover that we can not see a uniform portrait of Christ.

Not only do we have four very different gospels, each remarkably unique in their individual understandings of the meaning of Jesus' ministry, there are twenty-three additional books that articulate varying views of Jesus.

Even the thirteen letters attributed to Paul adapt the function and significance of Jesus Christ depending on the circumstances that need to be addressed in each congregation.

In our scripture text this morning, Jesus asks his disciples this question: "and you, who do *you* say that I am?"

Peter, so often the first to speak, responds, "you are the Messiah" (Mark

8:29). Of course, we who know the whole story know that Peter has given the right answer.

Yet the answer Peter gives is not actually very logical. The title "Messiah" in Hebrew or "Christ" in Greek was associated in Jewish tradition with an anointed king; a royal figure from the line of David expected to come and free Israel from their gentile oppressors, purify the people, and restore Israel's independence and glory. Nothing in Jesus' career up to now has given any indication of claims to royalty or political ambitions.

So far Jesus has made no claim to be the Messiah, and he certainly has shown no sign of taking on the romans. Perhaps Peter hopes that when they go to Jerusalem,

Jesus will finally take on this messianic role. Perhaps that is why Jesus tells his disciples to tell no one about him, because he knows that they are still so very far from understanding what he is all about.

As soon as Jesus begins to speak of what is to come in his career as Messiah -- rejection, suffering, and death -- Peter is quick to try to set him straight. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. We can imagine him saying, “no, no, Jesus, this is not the way it is supposed to go.

The Messiah is supposed to conquer the Romans, not get killed by them. **What good is a dead Messiah?”**

Peter's response is understandable in light of Jewish Messianic expectations,

which are perhaps not so very different from what we want in a savior.

What **do** we want in a savior? Have you ever really thought about that?

Just as Jesus is asking the disciples, “who do you say that I am?” He is also asking us. Since the New Testament books don't paint a concise, clear picture of Jesus, the savior, I wonder if there is a particular image that comes to your mind?

A cowboy in a white hat riding a white stallion? Maybe. Maybe John Wayne. Or would you prefer Brad Pitt.

We probably want someone who is strong and powerful, someone who will rescue us from our troubles and defeat our enemies.

Too often in popular evangelism, Jesus is presented in this way -- as a kind of

superhero who solves every problem for us, as a guarantor of prosperity and success. Nothing could be further from what Jesus has in mind.

Jesus' response to Peter is harsh: “get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mark 8:33).

This is one of those moments in scripture that highlights the vast distance between us and God.

Though Jesus is God with us, we cannot tame him or make him over into our image. We would like a savior who is a winner, and one who makes us winners, but Jesus insists on identifying with the lowliest of losers.

He will allow himself to be judged and condemned as a blasphemer by Jewish religious leaders.

He will allow himself to be mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the Romans.

And that’s not all. Jesus actually expects his disciples to follow him on this path of suffering and death.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:34-35).

Here I think it is important to be clear about what Jesus means by taking up the cross.

He is not talking about the suffering that is simply part of life in a broken world -- everything from annoying neighbors to serious illness to natural disasters.

Neither is he telling us to seek out suffering or martyrdom. Jesus himself did not seek it, but he foresaw that it would be the inevitable outcome of his mission. Jesus speaks of losing our lives ***for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel.***

Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences might be.

It means putting Jesus' priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security.

It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them for others -- using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience god's love made known in Jesus Christ.

How can we possibly do this? Our instinct for self-preservation fights it at every step. In this sense we are no different from the first disciples. They certainly tried to save their lives.

Though Jesus tried to prepare them for what was to come in Jerusalem, they all deserted him. And Peter -- that star student who had the right answer -- he not only ran away, he denied three times that he ever knew the man named Jesus.

We might wish that things had happened differently; that Jesus had followed a more

dignified, Messiah-like path, and that his disciples had been more heroic, but that is not the story we have before us.

What we have before us is a story about a Messiah being tortured and killed by the powerful and abandoned by his closest companions.

Yet Mark has announced from the beginning that this story is good news. How can this be? We need to read the whole story, to be sure.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with Silent Prayer

Reigning God, whom we have glimpsed in creation and in the life of one who shared our common lot, help us to acknowledge the Messiah, not in empty words, but in

self-emptying service that risks life for the sake of love. May we come to be so attuned to your teachings that the song of our hearts becomes contagious attraction, transforming the groups of which we are a part. May we demonstrate what Jesus has taught us.

Today we lift up all those who are struggling from health issues, mental issues, loneliness, and those who mourn. We pray for our community, our state, our country. May our leaders work together to help the people who they govern. We pray for all these things as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your name. Thy kingdom come; Thy

**will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And
forgive us our debts as, we forgive our
debtors. And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:
for gifts received.**

**We offer the treasures of this world as a
way of recalling all of us to a right
relationship with you, O God, the Source of
all wisdom and truth. Your design for life
is more to be desired than the finest gold.
To learn from you and to serve you is our
highest joy. May our offerings and our
daily lives communicate this message.
Amen.**

A FRANCISCAN BLESSING:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a

difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

PRAYER LIST:

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe Knapp, Jim Garrett, Agnes Doctolero, Julie Walker, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz, Warren Neff, Jack Harris, Wayne Huff, Jackie Canterbury, Doris Moody, Pastor Rosemary Captain.

Sunday, September 19 - Guest Pastor, Bob Goddard, will lead worship. Rev. Goddard retired recently from St. Paul UCC in Columbia, Illinois. He has been active in Illinois South for many years, serving

churches and the Illinois South Conference.

Sunday, October 3 - Riven Quartet, a men's Gospel quartet will lead us in worship for World-Wide Communion Sunday. You know what they say -- when you sing, you worship twice! You will be moved and inspired by the music and message that day.