

Three Words to Describe Jesus
Mark 8:27-29

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He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Mk. 8:29a

Today's sermon is one our Confirmands heard in March during one of our class sessions, but I am sure neither they nor the rest of you will be surprised to find me repeating myself.

Our 2020/2021 Confirmation work began in the fall with some study of the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith. We were interrupted by COVID in the first part of the winter but then re-convened in January and began reading the Gospel According to Mark. We read Mark as a book making a case for Jesus.

In session after session we asked the essential question concerning Jesus which Mark presses upon his readers: "Who is this?" (Mk. 4:41) Who is Jesus that heaven attested to him at his baptism? (Mk. 1:10-11) Who is Jesus that people left what they were doing and followed him as disciples? (Mk. 1:16-20) Who is Jesus that he can perform miracles? (e.g., Mk. 2:1-12) Who is he that he can teach what he does the way he does? (cf. Mk. 4)

This question culminates when Jesus makes it personal to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi and to us by extension: "But who do you say that I am?"

That is the quintessential Confirmation question. It runs through the Rite of Confirmation we shall have in a little while and evangelizing toward an answer is why we have the two years of Confirmation study that we do. Who is Jesus? Who do *you* say that he is?

It is also a good theme for Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost often and rightly focuses upon the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, the outpouring of God, who filled the disciples with power on Pentecost. But the bulk of Peter's Pentecostal sermon that day was about Jesus (Acts 2:17-36, esp. 22-36).

So we turn to the question the Rite of Confirmation presses upon the Confirmands and which the Gospel According to Mark presses upon us all. Who is Jesus? Who do *you* say that he is in and for your life?

Here are three words I use to say who he is. Jesus is my Lord. He is my Savior. He is my Friend.

Jesus is my Lord.

When I call Jesus my Lord I am surrendering my life to him. I am acknowledging he is my superior and my authority. I owe him and no other my highest allegiance and deepest devotion.

Some of you who are older went through Confirmation study using *The Heidelberg Catechism* as your text and guide. I hope you still remember Heidelberg's first question and answer:

What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

That I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ¹

Now that is a tremendous word of comfort, but it is also a word with an inherent command. You are not your own. You belong to Jesus. You are his. Your life is not to do with as you please. He is prior. He is your superior. He is your authority. He is your Lord.

When Jesus is acknowledged as Lord of a person's life that means he is not to be a periodic stop along the way, one whom a person acknowledges politely and occasionally. He is to be the heart and soul of the journey, the beginning, the middle, and the end. Jesus is Master over it all.

Somewhere now lost to me I read of a famous orchestra conductor who paused in rehearsal when the orchestra came to the end of a moving piece. While the notes still floated in the air he said, "Music is everything!" I beg to differ. Music is a fine thing, to be sure. But it is not everything. Jesus is everything! He alone is Lord.

Jesus is my Savior.

The idea of someone serving as a savior implies a rescue. News reports and social media frequently tell of dramatic rescues. The other day there was story of a small plane that crashed in a densely wooded area and the plane with its three passengers were dangling in the trees. It took some doing to reach them in the first place but first responders together with forestry personnel found them and carried them to safety. It was a dramatic rescue.

When I call Jesus my Savior I mean he has rescued me, and he has gone to great lengths and expertise to do it.

He has rescued me from sadness. Without him the story of my life would be dominated by sorrow early and defining. But he has rescued me from that sadness, somehow using the ropes and pulleys of joy to bring me out of sorrow's pit and into the light of gladness and laughter.

He has rescued me from aimlessness. How I love it that our UCC Statement of Faith says God saves us from aimlessness and sin. Aimlessness – the lack of purpose – isn't sinful but it is destructive, and Jesus has saved me from it. He was given me purpose, purpose for my life as a whole and purpose for each new day life brings.

And he has rescued me from brokenness. I wonder if you ever played with one of those balsa wood airplanes. I had them occasionally as a boy but often unsuccessfully. The wood was so light it frequently broke in my clumsy hands as I was trying to assemble the plane out of its package. Well, that is what happens with relationships, too. And it is largely what sin is. It is

¹ *The Heidelberg Catechism*, tr. by Allen O. Miller and M. Eugene Osterhaven (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1962), p. 9.

brokenness at our clumsy hands. Somehow we are the cause of breaks in our relationships with God, with other people, and with ourselves so that life just doesn't fly right. Thanks be to God, Jesus rescues us from the damage that we do.

He is Lord and he is Savior.

Jesus is my Friend.

Last week I quoted an old hymn in the sermon. The lines are these:

I've found a Friend, O such a Friend!
He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him.²

That very thing is true for me. I have found a living and lasting Friend in Jesus. What's more is that he is the one who has done the finding. In the scheme of the universe I am no more than a penny lost somewhere in the furniture and furnishings of a house. But Jesus looked behind the couch. He lifted every cushion. He swept the place clean like the woman in his parable, and he found me and rejoiced far better than I deserve (Lk. 15:8-10). I have found a Friend, but it is he who has done the finding.

And now I try to live each day as if in his presence. I try to acknowledge him first thing every morning and speak to him throughout the day. I try to give my mind to wondering about him, my thoughts to imagining he is with me in every experience, and my abilities, such as they are, to his use and purpose.

But the best part is that his friendship toward me has proved far more wonderful than mine to him. His loyalty is unbroken. His companionship is ever near. I have been lonely and he has been at my side. I have been afraid and he has stood with me. He has traveled with me to Africa, to England, and to Scotland; he has walked with me into rooms darkened by the shadow of death and ones blazoned with the heat of conflict. Time and again Jesus has proved his friendship to be faithful and true and so close it is not even a hair's breath away.

So that is who Jesus is to me. He is my Lord. He is my Savior. He is my Friend.

Who now do you say that he is? Turn to him as your Lord, your Savior, and your Friend. Move, even if ever so slightly, in his direction and he will win your favor, he will earn your trust, and he will show you, day after day after day, all he can be and do. And that shall be richness to you, richness beyond riches.

² James G. Small, "I've Found a Friend," *The Hymnal* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1941), #474.