

Text: [Mark 1:9-15](#)
Date: February 21, 2021
Title: Lent 2021: Keep or Toss? Week 1 “Who Do You Think You Are?”
Theme: Sometimes we have to let go of who we THINK we are to live into the fullness of who God called us to be.

1

Who do you think you are? Now, when you get asked that question, you know that the words that will next be directed your way are not going to be pleasant. In fact, at that point, it may be good to duck.

Very few questions are calculated to cause more offense than this. Who do you think you are? Strikes at the heart of what we’re about. It implies we’re reaching for something more than or bigger than what we deserve, that we’ve overstepped in some way. It’s meant to put us in our place, to quash our dreams, to limit our vision.

2

When we meet Jesus in today’s scripture, he’s already been told who he is. Which is also a dangerous thing. I have friends who just always knew they were going to be doctors. It was never even a question. Mom and Dad had it all figured out.

Jesus has already been told – in a voice from heaven – that he’s God’s Son. Clearly a VERY dangerous thing.

Mark sets the scene: as Jesus is coming up out of the water from his baptism, the heavens are torn open – a reference to Isaiah 64:1, and the fulfillment of a long-dreamed-for event among the people of Israel – the return of the prophetic voice. “If only you would tear open the heavens and come down!” Isaiah pleads.

When you’ve been told that you are God’s Son, then I have to imagine that “who do you think you are?” takes on a whole different meaning. It can go one of two ways, right? One path leads to entitlement – pride,

arrogance, command and control. The other leads...well, let's talk about where the other leads.

3

In Mark's gospel, there's no big temptation scene. Satan gets no speaking lines. All we know is that Jesus is tempted in the wilderness – which is a traditional place of testing, just like the people of Israel were tested in the wilderness after leaving Egypt.

But why the test? At once, the Spirit *forced* him out into the wilderness. Which tells me that, from God's perspective, this time of testing was necessary. What we also know about this testing is that it lasts a while – 40 days is a biblical way of saying, “a good long time.”

So, we know what comes before it – Jesus is told who he is. And we also know what comes after it – John the Baptist is thrown in jail, and Jesus picks up where he left off – preaching the coming reign and rule of God.

And with this information, I'm ready to venture a guess as to why the time of testing is necessary. Between being named as the Son of God and going to preach in the place of a prophet who's been thrown in jail, I think the Spirit needs Jesus to answer a question. And you already know what that question is, right? It's “who do you think you are?”

Because, like I said, when you tell someone they are the Son of God, it can go one of two ways. Either you follow the path of entitlement, or you find a different way.

4

It would have been natural for Jesus to hear “Son of God” and think, “charmed life.” Who is more worthy of honor and respect than the Son of God? Who is more worthy of being served?

But that wasn't Jesus' way. Jesus knew John. He'd been baptized by John. And when it came time to follow John into ministry, he went in understanding that sometimes – maybe oftentimes - a prophet's place isn't in the palace. It's in a prison.

5

Jesus could have heard “Son of God” and said to himself, “this is who I am.” You’re here for ME, and not the other way around. I deserve it. Don’t you know who I am?

But when tested – when the Spirit flipped the question and put him on the spot to say, “Who do you think you are?” Jesus demonstrated that he understood an important truth.

Sometimes we need to let go of who we THINK we are in order to live into the fullness of who God is calling us to be.

“Son of God” meant a lot more than just being in charge. A lot more than being served. A lot more than having people love and adore and hang on your every word.

It meant being in the world. Among the people whom God loves and wants to save. Teaching and healing and serving. And challenging those who claimed to have cornered the market on understanding who God is and what God does.

And that was a dangerous thing.

It might mean a prison cell, or it might mean worse.

But that was Jesus’ journey: how he let go of who he THOUGHT he was in order to become what God was calling him to be.

So, who do you think you are? What have you been told?

Maybe someone told you that the only path to greatness was to become...I don’t know...wealthy, powerful, important. Maybe someone convinced you that was the only thing that mattered.

Or perhaps it wasn’t that at all...maybe all your life people have been telling you that you DON’T matter...that nothing you say or do is worth anything. That you can’t make a difference because, after all, “who do you think you are?” That you’re not enough.

I’m not sure what it is that you need to let go of...what piece of who you *think* you are that you might need to toss in order to become all that God is calling you to be.

But this week, I want you to pray on it. Of all the things you think you are: what is God calling you to keep? What is God calling you to toss?

Because “who do you think you are?” Isn’t ultimately the question that matters.

Who does God think you are? Now, THAT’S the question that matters.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ